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# **ARRIVING AT THE SURFACE.**

An analysis of the organisation of the surface of paintings  
and the space around them as sites to generate  
specific practices of thought.

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy/Master of Philosophy

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## *Abstract*

### *ARRIVING AT THE SURFACE*

*An analysis of the organisation of the surface of paintings and the space around them as sites to generate specific practices of thought.*

This research project presents a number of approaches towards the surfaces produced within my own practice. In this sense it is a reversed critique, a meditation upon the practice of considering artworks shaped by the structures of the works themselves, rather than an attempt to align the works with other existing external structures of explanation.

The surface of the picture plane presents the researcher with grave difficulties. It is silent and fixed, and necessarily complete unto itself. It has a defined border that divides it from the flux of the world around it. Meditation upon such a site would seem to produce only a stream of interpretive reflection. Without the precise definitions of language, images might only appear to offer the opportunity for highly subjective responses, becoming material for textual metaphor. This approach overlooks the possibility that the site of the painting does not just represent ideas, but actually can be an apparatus to generate and contain thought. The 'surface' becomes not the hard unyielding face of the image, but a shifting border that must account for the movements of time and the mechanisms of perception. The surface is an object, and a series of events collapsed into this object.

To explore this possible 'event' in my own practice I undertook the exploration a number of different forms of organising and presenting works, combined with simultaneous investigations into other artist's work and methods. This mimics the way in which I construct my own work; allowing a group of image/ideas to coalesce around a projected 'surface', which here would be a defined space of production (a canvas, a exhibition space, a live performance). The danger of this approach is that the clumps of thought/image will remain singular and disconnected, and the surface will not exist as anything more than a collection of things. For the works to succeed as sites to generate specific thought they must also reveal some kind of method of investigation to the viewer. This project examines some particular instances where such methodologies can be seen in operation.

The research project divides into two volumes. The first emerging from images and allusive

texts related to the show of works 'Lark'. The second, 'Arriving at the Surface' explores different ideas of surface and movement of thought through investigating specific historical practices.

'Lark' was the display and performance of works which had occurred over three years. The space of the show became 'the ground' the fixed point, from which individual pieces found a relation to one another. Each room of this space opened both onto other rooms, and on to its own state at other times.

'Arriving at the surface' is a text modelled on the painting genre, the 'Wanderjammer' (cabinet of curiosities). This form is used to question what occurs when a number of individual surfaces, groups of paintings and objects, are combined into a single structure.

Two specific historical systems of regard are considered, each of which were accompanied by precise articulations of method. The first is the Painted Chamber of Lady Anne Drury, an artefact rooted in theories of the Emblem form. This hieroglyphic enmeshing of image and text completely immersed the viewer in its multiple surfaces. The second is the development of the Suprematist system of Kazimir Malevich, viewed as a record of the artist's uneasy encounter with his own work, specifically the various emergences of the 'Black square'. The text concludes with descriptions of the kinds of movements and positions that the surface of a painting demands of the viewer. These are expressed in terms of loops of movement in and around the surface of the picture plane, as moments of informal connection described as conversation, and as points of eclipse and revelation.

The two volumes of the project are to be viewed simultaneously, providing an experience of the generative process of the research. The gradual emergence of constellations of work within 'Lark' guided the explorations carried out in 'Arriving at the Surface'. Ideas that arose and were articulated in writing for the text fed back into the practice of making work. The project as a whole functions both as an expression and as an experience of the thought within it.

A conscious attempt has been made to retain some of this episodic and granular quality within the writing. This allows a greater sense of the absent objects of the practice to emerge, recognised through an echo of form. The writing occupies a tenuous position poised between document and reflective investigation, an arrangement not unlike that of a figure standing in front of a painting. Attention hovers between different sites of possible focus, the figure, the painting, and the space of regard between them. Any unifying description must take account

of the web of relations between these figures. A web in time, growing, breaking, falling and growing again. This fragility is also an opportunity to retain a certain openness that allows a nuanced sense of the research project as a whole to exist. The 'Surface' of this research project, the site of arrival becomes the attempt to occupy the membrane between viewer and picture plane. The text seeks to find form as a pathway through the patterns of the constellations of work in the show 'Lark'. A chart of navigation melded to an account of a particular journey, at a particular time. Now, here at this point, the surface.

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### *Introduction To The Work As Whole.*

*This research project explores the construction of a space of practice. It exists in the tension between two substances, paint and ink, and the examination of the surfaces that they are deployed upon. The work exists as an extended process of association, an attempt to pilot into momentary convergence. The movement (which might be described as method) is a practice of crystallisation and pulverisation. The supersaturated element falling into larger form, and then a grinding back into particles.*

As an artist I produce work in a variety of media, working with painting, installation, sound, live performance and text. I also frequently collaborate with others. I conceive of each media working within it's own time frame. At one extreme is live work, fast and improvisational, collaborative in production and output, whereas in contrast painting is slow and contemplative, solitary in execution, an amalgamation of actions growing from marks unmade and steps untaken. This guilt-free eclecticism is a feature that I share with many contemporary artists, different elements utilised when appropriate to a particular work.

The contemporary artist is faced with the difficulty of bringing this expanse of possibility into a coherence with which a non-expert viewer can connect. The artist is enmeshed in a web of dependencies through which commercial and critical positions are established. Rather than a fluid system of invention, the artist's works can become hardened into repetitions of expected form deployed to accommodate the demands of a variety of external systems: the gallery, the critic, the funder, the amorphous undefined 'art world'.

The negotiation of this situation has been instrumental in the flourishing of artistic practices, which employ a diversity of media, and concurrently the development of an acute awareness of the specific time and space of the artworks' production and display. It has also been the focus of intense theoretical discussion. In the following paragraphs I will discuss how this negotiation has been approached. I will outline one conspicuous recent account that valorises practices that claim that the gallery space can be configured as a neutral zone where completely novel social relationships can be modelled. I will then argue that this account is inadequate because it fails to encompass the importance of the impact of history within art practice. Through a description of some contemporary artists practices I define this impact not as a passive, but as an active presence. A concern with the operation of different senses of relation and experience emerges; 'relation' as what happens within the social space of the

gallery, and also of the artist's relation with knowledge; 'experience' as direct encounter and as cumulative knowledge. Finally I will propose that the form of this practice based research project is the most appropriate way of exploring my approach to bringing coherence to the diversity of my own practice.

In the collection of writings 'Relational Aesthetics'<sup>1</sup> the curator Nicolas Bourriaud seeks to describe a trend identifiable amongst a wide range of artists who, he argues, reject the limitations and comfortable security of past dogmas '*ceasing to take shelter behind the sixties art history*'.<sup>2</sup> Bourriaud argues that contemporary art might best be understood as relational, concerned with creating spaces for free social interactions.

*'The subversive and critical function of contemporary art is now achieved in the invention of individual and collective vanishing lines in those temporary and nomadic constructions whereby the artist models and disseminates disconcerting situations'*<sup>3</sup>

Rather than the production of art objects Bourriaud argues that relational artists use as their media the space of the gallery and the engineering of social exchanges within it, which he asserts are a crucible for experiments in wider society. Bourriaud's intention is to celebrate the sweeping away of blockages and allow a more direct experience of art, small scale local and relevant<sup>4</sup>. However the examples he chooses to illustrate this do not fully convincingly support this argument, and his work has been effectively criticised for resting far too comfortably within the existing structures of the art world.<sup>5</sup> This dependency undermines the

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<sup>1</sup> Bourriaud, Nicolas (trans by Pleasance S and Woods F). *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Reel, Dijon 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Pg7 *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Pg31 *ibid*. This is explicitly influenced by Felix Guattari's writing. Bourriaud discusses Guattari at length in the final section of *Relational Aesthetics* Pg86-105

<sup>4</sup> '...the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist' Pg 13 *ibid*  
The artists who Bourriaud cites as typical of this type of practice emerge from a variety of different backgrounds. Among them he includes Felix Gonzales-Torres, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno, Maurizio Cattelan, Gabriel Orozco, Pierre Huyghe, Noritoshi Hirakawa, Carsten Holler, Douglas Gordon and Angela Bulloch.

<sup>5</sup> 'The ability of 'Relational Aesthetics' to make or even clearly voice any social criticism has been convincingly questioned in Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October* 110, Fall 2004 and Martin, Stewart, 'A critique of relational aesthetics' Third Text Volume 21, [Number 4, July 2007, pp. 369-386\(18\)](#)

claim that art's theoretical grounding therefore is '*the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space*'.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to Bourriaud I would argue that it is exactly at the point where the 'independent' and 'private' overlap with wider 'human relations' and 'social contexts' that art produces thought and experience which are not effectively accessed in any other way. I dispute that the dismissal of history advocated by Bourriaud generates the zone of direct experience he describes. It is equally as likely to produce work that disconnects the viewer and artist and leads to a dependency on the authority of the institution of the gallery.<sup>7</sup> I propose that the artist and viewer critically engage with past practices and consider them as active processes of thought, not passive representations. This is as much a mental space of relation as the gallery is a physical one, and is manifested in the convergence of these elements in the event of the artwork, which exists both as a physical object and a concordance of conceptions. The relational experience emerges as an individual history of encounter, an intimation of autonomy.

The following brief examination of the work of three contemporary British artists reveals an operation within a wide set of relationships, both internal and external, and an understanding of a variety of historical influences. Each of these artists can be seen to display characteristics which are symptomatic of trends within art in general, and which illuminate concerns found within my own practice. These concerns can be broadly described as falling into three areas, which are; an encounter with the archive as an active space of memory; the use of practical enactment as a method of understanding and experiencing knowledge; and the mounting and over layering of different registers of knowledge, a process whereby mutual interrogation and interruption occurs. These three elements are the underlying methods of this investigation. They demonstrate different ways in which contemporary art connects not only with a history of ideas, but is also the innovative extension of these ideas. In this they vary markedly from Bourriaud's 'year zero' approach in which history is a static inert force. In this research project a sense of history develops in parallel to the understanding of the concept of the image, both acting as dynamic apparatuses for thought. With this understanding the individual figure of the artist or curator becomes less potent, less able to dominate and direct, but more interesting and complex.

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<sup>6</sup> Pg113 Bourriaud, Nicolas (trans by Pleasance S and Woods F). *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Reel, Dijon 1998.

<sup>7</sup> The following quote is indicative of Bourriaud's dismissal of past theory. '*Traditional critical philosophy (the Frankfurt School in particular) now only fuels art in the form of archaic folklore, a magnificent but ineffectual toy.*' Pg31 *ibid*.



A direct meditation on the functioning of art's history is to be found in Goshka Macuga's recent exhibition '*Objects in Relation*'.<sup>8</sup> In this sculptural installation the artist selected a number of works from the Tate gallery's archive, and displayed them entangled with her own work. The result combined different experiences of the gallery. It displayed the feeling of personal, intimate connection to particular works that a frequent visitor to a gallery develops, a sense of vicarious ownership. It also hinted at the sense of hidden and selective memory that is implicit within great public archives. Certain works will always be displayed whilst others disappear into dark storage. Correspondences emerged at many levels. The personal charge of the artist's attraction to specific works gave their display an altogether different tenor. The artwork as a whole displayed an individual's connection with an existing tradition not simply as the product of an unfolding of history but also as a series of a-causal encounters, which interrupt and short circuit dominant flows.

Jeremy Deller operates in a completely different formal environment. Rather than the space of the art gallery he works with practices of contemporary folk art<sup>9</sup>, cultural forms which flourish outside of a narrower conception of 'high art'. In 2001 '*The Battle of Orgreave*' employed a variety of methods to investigate a recent, highly emotive, political event.<sup>10</sup> The starting point was to restage the clash between striking miners and the police at Orgreave Coking Plant in 1984, using the techniques of enthusiasts' historical re-enactments of past wars. Some of those re-enacting the event had been involved in the original clashes. Others provided detailed personal background through interviews. The event was filmed by Mike Figgis. Deller's work allows a spectrum of views to emerge. The enthusiast's recreation, oral history and documentary filmmaking are combined in this work to enable a fresh understanding of history. The work is also manifested as a book, accompanied by a CD recording of the interviews of original participants from which Deller gathered material.<sup>11</sup> The event becomes visible as an array of individual experiences as well as a point in a polemical argument. Particularly impressive is the film's communication of those processes whereby opposing abstract ideas become compressed through events into physical clashes. Memory becomes a dynamic presence as an active recreation of movement in following the tactics of police and miners. Ideology is not allowed to separate into an abstract conflict, but remains determinately embodied. The artist's use of re-enactment allows him to create a position which although reflective is not alienated.

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<sup>8</sup> Goshka Macuga. '*Objects in Relation*' Art Now, Tate Britain, London, June 2007.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of his definition of this see Deller, J and Kane, A *Folk Archive: Contemporary Popular Art from the UK*, Bookworks, London 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Deller. '*The Battle of Orgreave*' Commissioned by Artangel and C4 film directed by Mike Figgis. 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Deller, J. *The English Civil War Part II: •Personal accounts of the 1984-85 miners' strike*, Artangel, London 2002.

Both of the above practitioners remain outside their work, retaining something of the traditional notion of the division between artist and artwork. This is not the case in the following example in which the artists appear fully immersed within their own productions. The performances, installations and writings of the collective Plastique Fantastique (David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan) cohere around defined sets of movement in particular spaces. The diverse elements of their practice are placed in combinations to produce works which exist as an 'event' somewhere between an affective encounter and reflective critique. Images act as the focus for repetitive actions, stations for movements along set patterns undertaken with the aim of mental reformation.<sup>12</sup> They describe their work as

*'a mythopoetic fiction - an investigation of aesthetics, the sacred and politics - produced through comics, performances, text, assemblages and shrines'.*

Plastique Fantastique combine a study of contemporary texts with practices of understanding drawn from a variety of historical sources. They take the claims for potency of ritual acts at face value and explore how they are embedded and efficacious within contemporary culture. The work highlights the artists' own experience of the actions they undertake, and its transformative potential. To the viewer they appear as something between religious ritual and political demonstration demanding an extension of trust to accept the artists' actions as functioning within the terms the artists themselves define. In this the work becomes collaborative, asking the viewer to allow a fragile sense of an alternative real to be demonstrated.

All of the above mentioned artists make work that in part exists as a conversation with other practices. Within each of these practices different thought systems are brought together into a plane of recognition. This plane can be described as the surface of the work, the coherent point of contact with the viewer. Viewers create a position for each work in relation to their encounters with all previous works. This process does not produce a total synthesis but the dynamic construction of increasingly complex constellations. This occurs as much as a conception of time as within unified theorising and formal ordering. It is the attempt to align the constant flux and infinite interrelations of the perceived world with a conceptual space, which is differentiated, self-sustaining and singular; the ground of rational understanding.

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<sup>12</sup> For a complete archive of their works and associated texts see [www.plastiquefantastique.org](http://www.plastiquefantastique.org)

This research project has grown from a number of approaches towards the surfaces produced within my own practice. In this sense it is a reversed critique. It is a meditation upon artworks shaped by the structures of the works themselves, rather than an attempt to align the works with existing external structures of explanation. I place various historical visual artefacts alongside my own work, and reflect on these conjunctions through enactment of the processes of thought generated by this alignment. The primary site of this investigation is the surface of the painting, which I imagine as the ground of my practice as an artist. Through the examination of my own research I develop a practice-based approach that allows access to areas of knowledge that become obscured within critical/theoretical reflections. This fluid method of discovery is in itself almost indefinable save as a myriad of individual complications that through their articulation reveal an experience of thought as a process.

The surface of the picture plane presents the researcher with grave difficulties. It is silent and fixed, and necessarily complete unto itself. It has a defined border that divides it from the flux of the world around it. Reflection on such a site would seem to produce only a stream of interpretive reflection. Without the precise definitions of language, images might appear to offer the opportunity for highly subjective responses, becoming material for textual metaphor. This approach overlooks the possibility that the site of the painting does not just represent ideas, but actually can be an apparatus to generate and contain thought. The 'surface' becomes not the hard unyielding face of the image, but a shifting border that must account for the movements of time and the mechanisms of perception. The surface is an object, and a series of events collapsed into this object.

To explore this possible 'event' in my own practice I undertook a number of different forms of organising and presenting works, combined with simultaneous investigations into other artist's work and methods. This approach mimics the way in which I construct individual works; allowing a group of image ideas to coalesce around a projected 'surface', which here would be a defined space of production (a canvas, a exhibition space, a live performance). The constant danger of this approach is that the clumps of thought/image will remain singular and disconnected, and the surface will not exist as anything more than a collection of things. For the works to succeed as sites to generate specific thought they must also reveal some kind of method of investigation to the viewer.

This research project might be understood as focussing not on the production of new work, although many works were produced, but rather as an ordering and display of existing and new works into different relationships. Over the period of the research this was divided into several distinct investigations, each of which provided elements of formal organisation that

shaped the project as a whole.

The first period was based about the investigation of the Painted Chamber of Lady Anne Drury, an artefact rooted in sixteenth century theories of the emblem form, a hieroglyphic enmeshing of image and text. Here a space was created that completely surrounded and immersed the viewer in multiple surfaces. . This culminated in the show *'I am Empty, I am Full'* at Christchurch mansion in July 2005, in which a set of my own was shown alongside the chamber in its' present location. Through many visits to the present site of the chamber I began to understand something of the repetition of pattern in its' construction, and how this reflected a wider system of understanding not immediately apparent. Through a process of historical research I was able to reconstruct a sense of the chamber existing as an interrelated immersive environment, constructed from images that formed part of a daily practice of meditation. I adopted this notion to my own research, creating systems of methodical investigation.

I created my own model of the chamber and began a process of researching each panel individually, producing a historical analysis, a thematic placement and a personal reflection on each. This was echoed within the studio where I began to consider my own works as groups of overlapping narratives that might be organised into some total arrangement.

The second period of research centred on the physical construction of environments that mimicked something of the organisation of the chamber, and a consideration of how such structures might operate as a method of exhibiting. From this grew a concern with the idea of a surface of apprehension, a plane on which different kinds of thought might become visible. Several works generated this thought and were shown together in 2006 as *'Apprehension'*. Passages of writing produced at this time were records of 'events' describing processes of thought in unison with actual physical movement.

The third period of the project was concerned with the question of how to bring together the various productions that the project had generated into a form of organisation that both allowed an appreciation of individual works and also a sense of development, interrelation and movement over time. Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist system was underpinned by a similar endeavour, a reconsidering of past works as a completely interconnected process of thought to a point of present apprehension. Within my research this involved investigating the multiple presence of the 'Black square' within Malevich's work. The surface of the canvas here becomes a space that reveals a disconnection with the world. The viewer must attempt to penetrate and move into this space to achieve an understanding of the limitation and possibilities of their perception and understanding. From studying Malevich I was able to

understand how concepts of constellation and orbit might be useful in creating a system of interrelating my own works.

Finally these phases of research were assembled into a presentation as the show 'Lark' and as the text 'Arriving at the Surface'.

The methodology of these investigations is not a structure of abstract logic, although it does adhere to an internally defined logical process. It is necessarily anchored to a specific encounter with an external object, which defines it in part as an experiential process. This research process explores some aspects of the nature of this encounter for the figure, both artist and viewer, positioned in front of the picture plane. This exploration leads to the conclusion that the encounter might be best understood as a series of loops, shifting points of revelation and occlusion.

The work is divided into two volumes. The first of these is a set of images and allusive texts related to the show of works 'Lark'. The second volume 'Arriving at the Surface' explores different ideas of surface and movement of thought through investigating specific historical practices and works.

'Lark' existed as a display and performance of works over a three-year period. The declared space of the show became the fixed point from which these individual pieces found a relation to one another. These relationships were framed in a number of ways. Works were overlaid; two divided events being brought together to occur simultaneously. Barely possible conjunctions were formed with the work of other artists. Each room of the space was allowed to open both onto other rooms, and on to its own state at other times.

Lark was a space of association and conversation. This reporting exists as anecdote, a blending of presence and fiction. (Perhaps it still exists. If so it is also always drifting away). The objects within the space spin more and more completely into their own orbits. The occupant of the space must be in constant movement, as is the space around. There is no rest here, no firm ground. The maps of the space, planned trajectories of making or viewing are finite, a firework enlightenment.

'Arriving at the surface' is a text modelled on the structure of a specific genre of painting, the 'Wanderjammer' (cabinet of Curiosities). This form questions what occurs when a number of

individual surfaces, groups of paintings and objects, are combined into a single structure. What movements of thought are required of the viewer to experience such a constellation? The process of investigation becomes a very close investigation of specific paintings, which are imagined as being contained within this arrangement.

The title 'Arriving at the Surface' is taken from a statement made by the artist Kazimir Malevich.

*'I have arrived at the surface and can take the dimension of  
a living body'*<sup>13</sup>

His elliptical and often seeming contradictory productions have long been a source of fascination and inspiration to artists and critics alike. Within this project Malevich's attempts to align his theorising with the productions of his artwork becomes exemplary. Despite his prodigious output of theoretical writing, the artist never established an easy continuity within his thought. Most marked was the constant troubling presence of the work 'Black Square on a white ground' which repeatedly interrupted his attempts to systematise and explain; the attempt to contain and understand something, that although entirely his own production, he was also excluded from. In the above quote, he equates this possible 'arrival' with life itself. Each such moment of confident revelation was accompanied by an attempt to reassess and realign all his previous work into a logical progression towards the point he occupied in the present. This near impossible task demanded an understanding of the objects of past production both as static and finished containers of meaning, and as still mobile and mutable events within a greater trajectory. Malevich's descriptions of this conjunction of movement and stillness created an image of an orbital system of thought mirroring that of the cosmos. Here the surface becomes a shifting plane of recognition and understanding through which orbiting objects pass, and upon which some limited understanding can be grounded. This surface might be manifest as a show of work, or as writing or speech. Each arrangement forms a 'constellation', an arrangement visible from a fixed viewpoint.

The text concludes with some descriptions of the kinds of movements and positions that the surface of a painting demands of its viewer. These are expressed in terms of loops of movement in and around the surface of the picture plane, as moments of informal connection

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<sup>13</sup>. Kazimir Malevich, *Statement quoted Pg40 Malevich, Kasimir. (trans by Glowacki-Prus, X & McMillin, A) Anderson, Troels (ed) Essays on Art 1915-1933, Vol 1. Rapp & Whiting, London 1968.)*

described as conversation, and as points of eclipse and revelation.

The two volumes of the project are presented to be viewed simultaneously, providing an experience of the generative process of the research process adopted. The gradual emergence of constellations of work within 'Lark' guided the explorations carried out in 'Arriving at the Surface'. Ideas that arose and were articulated in writing for the text then fed back into the practice of making work. The work as a whole is designed to function both as an expression and as an experience of the thought within it.

This research project is an attempt to 'arrive' at the event of the surface, and through this 'arrival' to suggest a kind of methodology. To achieve this it is necessary for the viewer/reader to move into the same pattern of enacted thought as the artist. The work then becomes an attempt to go beyond an anecdotal record of work undertaken, and to itself become 'curious', a plane of loops of time and movement. The work grew as an accumulation of images and episodes of writing. These fragments were then assembled into larger constructions, constellating around wider themes.

The structure of these investigations has been modelled on the practice of construction within the studio, ideas assembled from fragments into larger relationships, some of which allow further growth others that collapse back onto themselves. A conscious attempt has been made to retain some of this episodic and granular quality within the writing. This allows a greater sense of the absent objects of the practice to emerge, recognised through an echo of form.

The writing occupies a tenuous position poised between document and reflective investigation, an arrangement not unlike that of a figure standing in front of a painting. Attention hovers between different sites of possible focus, the figure, the painting, and the space of regard between them. Any unifying description must take account of the web of relations between these figures. A web in time, growing, breaking, falling and growing again. This fragility is also an opportunity to retain a certain openness that allows a more nuanced sense of the research project as a whole to exist. The 'Surface' of this research project, the site of arrival becomes this plane stretched between viewer and picture plane. The text seeks to find form as a pathway through the patterns of the constellations of work in the show 'Lark'. A chart of navigation melded to an account of a particular journey, at a particular time. Now, here at this point, the surface.

*VOLUME I*

LARK



Volume 1 List of Images

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# LARK

*A description.*



### *The Landscape of 'Lark'*

The exhibition occurs within a large green shed which stands by the coast, it is like a cow shed, an agricultural construction. Inside is quiet save for the creaks and shifts as temperature flexes the metal skin. Rattling bird footsteps sound across the roof.

All around mud flats glisten, light, liquid. Their surface is smooth, a mirror of the sky above. Wind ripples and commands ranks of waves into motion. Parallel at first, they distort in response to the shape of the submerged landscape. Half buried fragments sit above the water, catching and throwing light. At times the glare is blinding; sunlight reflected, refracting into broken blazing points and beams. Close your eyes and feel the splashes of warm light on the skin, soaking into the membrane of the eyelids.

At this particular place on the coast there is a confluence of the sea, sky, river and great banks of shingle. They seem to balance each other, to absorb each other. The water is full of force but the waves act like a pulse, not splashing into foam, but pulling back into themselves. The stones are ground away by the current. Not smashed apart but rubbed, shifted into millions of differing relationships with each other. The process of dissolution of rock to particle is a slow incomplete erasure. The landscape here is shaped by the movement of sea and river flow, a constant shifting and altering of this mass of sand and shingle. The rhythm of these movements is dictated daily by the incremental shifts of the tide, the influence of the orbit of the distant moon.

The land is a tenuous construction, dunes held together by the roots of clumps of grass. Plants form into low spreading star shapes, pale green and yellow, their appearance a result of a tolerance of the harsh conditions, compromises made in order to exist in this margin. At the tide line clumps of seaweed lay, exuding a scent of deep briny water, so strong you feel the salt crystals cake in the back of your throat, a taste, smell, that clags the nostrils.

The landscape is subject not only to the regular movement of the tide but also to the sudden impact of storm and flood, funnelled and focussed by the river channel. The impress of such events remains visible in patterns of wreckage that intersect and overlay each other. The forces of land, sea and sky meet and intermingle here. The border is porous and any ascendancy is reversed in time. Often it is difficult to establish perspective, the horizon not a well defined line but a degree of shading, compressing to an opaque world. It is discontinuous, discerned through a habit of the viewer. At other times the line curves egg hard and mathematical, a constant receding division.

A scattering of heavy concrete constructions punctuate the area, defensive bunkers, gun emplacements, pill boxes slotted and squat, platforms and observation points, lines of cubic tank traps. These objects are arrayed in relation to one another, yet the original precision of their deployment has been eroded. The land beneath them has shifted, twisting buildings away from their original spot. Others have slid down slopes, and toppled together; the robust nature of their construction has allowed them to survive such movements unscathed, they sit at odd angles to the land that once supported them. The channels they guarded have also shifted, now the carefully calibrated sightlines focus on random spots. The strong geometrical shapes, which form these masses, have slowly become abstracted, departing from the once absolute purpose of their design. They are absorbed into the flux of the landscape.

The sandlings, the tussocked heath behind the shore, is the place for skylarks. Their nests are small bowls of woven grass, the size of a cupped hand. They hold four brown speckled eggs and lie among the long grass hidden from sight. The birds rise straight up then hover high in the air, as if bouncing on a string. A collective exaltation<sup>14</sup>. At first one is visible then more, at different heights, different levels. Some the merest dot, revealed only by their voice. Their song is a flow of sound, made unique by a continuous variation of its pattern. They link the sky and land. Reflected in a pool one seems to descend downwards to meet its own rising mirror image.

This is a quiet place, sounds travel from the distance as cleanly and as contained as glints of light. If you walk away from the heath into the middle of the pebble dunes then all you can hear is the crunch of the gravel, your steps pushing against the shifting surface, and the wind. The wind is not so much a sound as a weight that first pushes against you then suddenly lets you fall. Lay down and even this disappears. You drop into an empty space, drain into the gaps between the stones. A dusty bone dryness. Gentle warmth leaks from the sun-baked surface, and for a time each pebble is a tiny oven with its own hot core. A gentle entropy, gentle loss. Or a further exchange, warmth moved from sun to stone, stone to body, and then from body to stone as the sun sets.

Cradled in the pebbles the silence becomes palpable. It engenders a sudden awareness of the membrane of your eardrum, which is now still, and of the diaphragm in your chest pushing in and out, the rhythmic emptying and filling of your lungs. Time becomes a measurement of the heartbeat, the movement of blood pumping. An awareness of thought as a physical action begins to emerge, thought located amongst these rhythms, woven through them. The acute

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<sup>14</sup> This collective noun for a group of larks was first coined by the poet John Lydgate, (1370-1451) a monk at Bury St Edmunds and a prolific writer, born in Lidgate, Suffolk.

sense of each perception runs parallel to reflection, to the construction of a 'whole' experience of mind. Each pulls at the other, interrupts and extrapolates.

This landscape is a site of constant convergence. It constructs itself, reforms itself through the impact of these interactions. It has a complexity that is formed through this dynamic balance, which does not allow dominance by any one element. The show Lark was born within this landscape, a loop and orbit contained by this space and time.





### *The Messenger*

The skylark ascends to become a spot on the surface of the sky. As they reach their highest point they disappear, but leave a tiny dot, an afterimage that drifts across the curve of the eyeball, fading back into the mechanism of the optic nerve.

The bird's flight, a vertical ascent is not a movement from one place to another, but to hang high suspended as the world turns beneath. The purpose is display and announcement, song.

To lark is also to be playful. As an event 'a lark' is not serious. This might also be construed as a lack of meaning, an exercise in pointlessness, but also somehow an entertainment.

To William Blake the trajectory of the skylark was also the pattern of perception and inspiration, the smallest contact at the furthest extension. The mind becomes the interactions of a field full of larks.

*"But the Larks Nest is at the Gate of Los, at the eastern Gate of  
wide Golgonooza & the Lark is Los's Messenger  
When on the highest lift of his light pinions he arrives  
At that bright Gate, another Lark meets him & back to back  
They touch their pinions tip: and each descend  
To their respective Earths."*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> William Blake *Milton* Book II chap35 line 61 Golgonooza is the 'City of Imagination' and also a model of human consciousness.



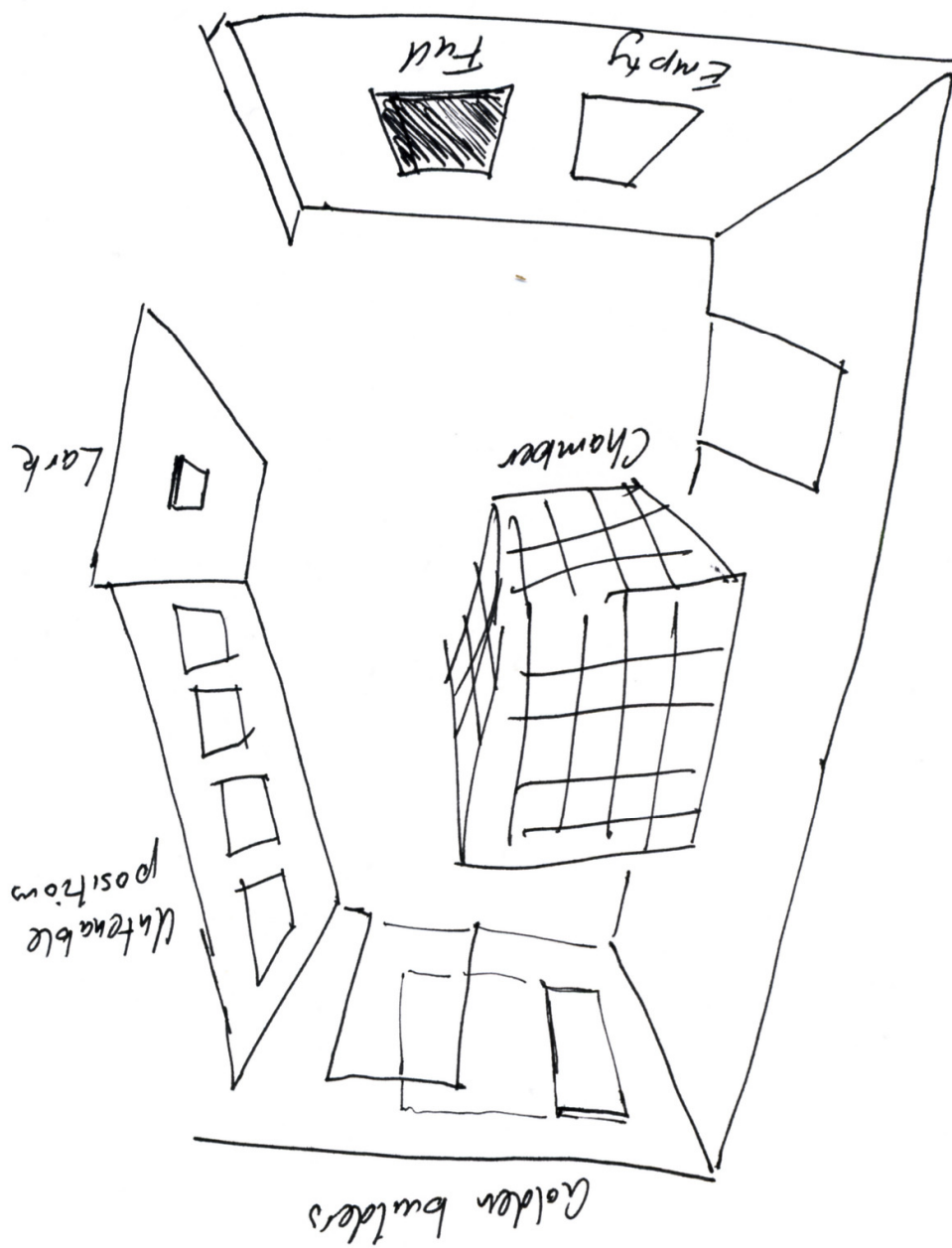
*Sitting In Front Of The Painting.*

So much time in the studio is spent just sitting, the chair carefully positioned in front of the painting. Sometimes this feels like an active examination in which there is awareness of the work, of looking as a series of rehearsals of possible interventions on the surface. At other times it seems to be an empty regard, the mind void of any plan, and the eyes moving across the surface without set direction.

Within Lark there existed symmetry. The position of the artist seated by the door, perhaps unseen as an invigilating figure, mirrored the pose of the figure in the canvas that was propped up at the rear of the show.

This was also the temporal relationship, the canvas was the oldest work in the show; the seated figure outlined was the artist in 2004. The figure by the door is of course the most immediate presence of the artist.





### *Little Black Egg*

To one side a pair of paintings matched in size, one black, and one white, (the dominant colour scheme of this area). Egg shapes occupy the centre of each painting. Thrown-dropped? The paintings are formed of layers that lie between the egg's slightly raised impasto, and a scraped hole dug into the surface of the support (revealing the support itself to be a laminate construction, a rough plywood).

Several recognisable scenes are discernable in the layers. Two bowl forms appear ready to catch the eggs. A film crew huddles around a camera, picked out as silhouettes of black, against a dustier black. A crouching figure is discernable in the orange uniform and sensory deprivation muffles of the torture camp. The landscape of Willy Lots cottage is visible, the bridge of the 'Haywain'.

Each panel has its own light. One a dark diamond refraction, which seems to offer little illumination, only a revelation of hard forms. The other a floating white glow, refracting into pastel shards, a constant even light.

One of these works is titled 'Empty' the other 'Full'. Could this be applied to each of the eggs. One hollow, the other packed. One a fold of stars, an absolute limit. The other a crucible, a package of life, the source of a possible endless expansion. In relationship these two produce a rhythmic pattern, a breathing pace of opposite arrangements. Perhaps they are part of the same continuum, different points of time rendered simultaneously (rendered by the hand of the artist or rendered by the thought of the observer?). The similar sizes offer the possibility of bringing the two planes together, perhaps the opposites will combine into absoluteness.







*'I Visit Other Worlds, But I Don't Touch Them.'*

When I was a historian I was given the job of creating a record of a site, which was disappearing with alarming speed. So everyday I crunched around these brutal concrete objects trying to discern their original purposes, how they interlinked. This was difficult, as the ground beneath them had shifted; some had even fallen off the cliffs to land at strange angles on the beach below.

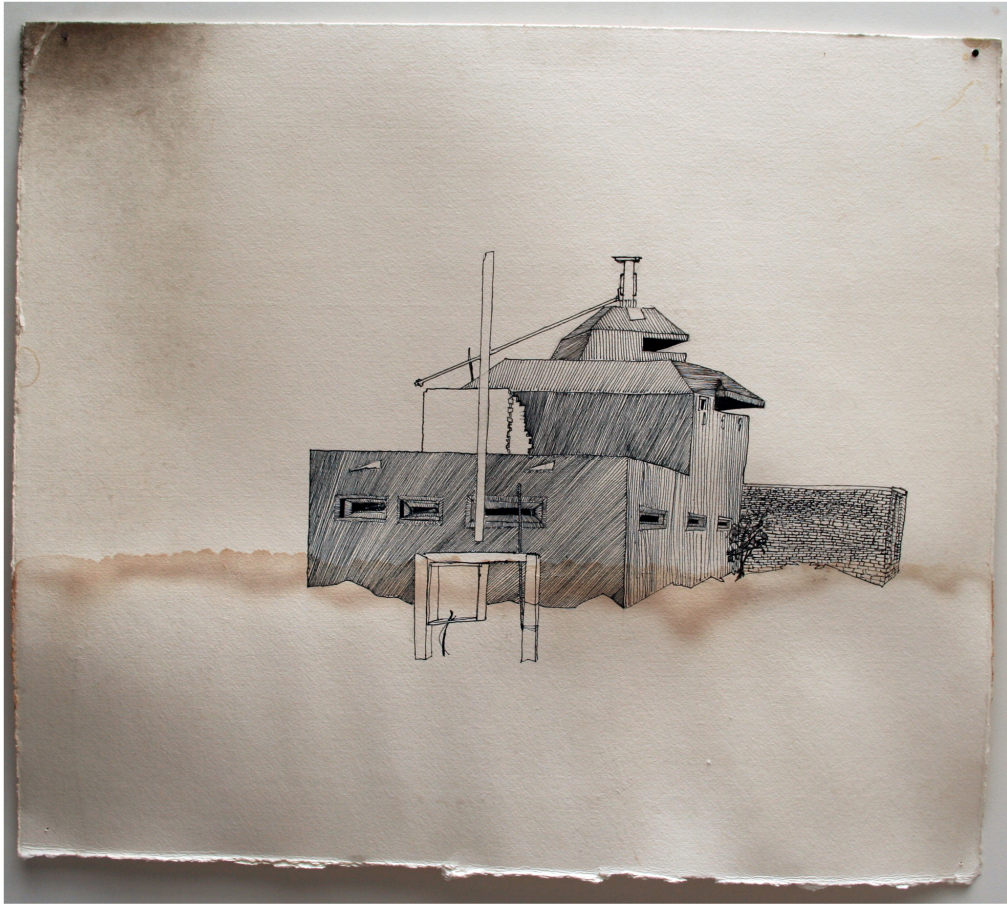
I used to hear noises from inside some of these forbidding structures. The sound of singing, swearing, shouting and dancing. The voice's pitch and accent veered widely between extremes. There was also a rhythmic clicking of a keyboard. I would call in through the slit like window and eventually started a conversation. This soon became the highlight of the day. In fact the people who had asked for the survey disappeared, their department shut down and amalgamated. I was told to continue, but to not actually do anything.

So everyday I talked to this person who appeared to be shifting from pillbox to pillbox. Their name, they said, was Lou Lewis. Lou claimed to have been born on a Pacific island in Micronesia. Lou began by telling me extravagant stories about the fortress, how it was ancient, or how it was not a fortress at all but a model of the fortresses on the opposite side of the sea; built so our armies could practice storming them.

*Lou told me more and more long and extravagant stories and posted sheets of paper out of the slot like windows. These were lists of books, many of them obscure, some not. I searched out the works and found that all the books contained some reference to a Lou Lewis, although the name was often misspelt. My attention was especially drawn to one book on the list that had been heavily underlined in blue pencil. The title was I got to go and the author L.ou Lewis<sup>16</sup>. In it Lou claimed to have visited several famous Utopias and also somewhat implausibly to be present at the creation of the White Horse of Uffington.*

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis, Lou. *I got to go* Solomon Press, Beccles, 1950. (invented).





*Quo Tendis?*<sup>17</sup>

I do not know where to begin.

At the centre of the mind, the tongue, the skin, the eyeball, the arm, the hand, the tips of the fingers?

Half Lost?

The place we found ourselves was a room, a square space.

We? Mind and hand!

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<sup>17</sup> Where are you leading? This motto accompanies an image of the winged serpent tongue in the Painted Chamber at Halstead.







### *Interrogation*

*Although a variety of means might be employed in interrogation, ultimately it is a one-way process, a rigid pattern with a definite goal. Within such an encounter knowledge is seen as an object, a lump which is concealed, or even only partially present, but which can be located, extracted and utilised. The revelation is sought whole, contained but disconnected. It can be held onto. The process has a bordered rationality, which allows for the transcendence of another's space.*

*Are these impulses, revelation and interrogation somehow linked in the human mind both offering a path to transcending doubt? Or are they diametrically opposed, one ethical and consensual the other a brutal cynicism.*





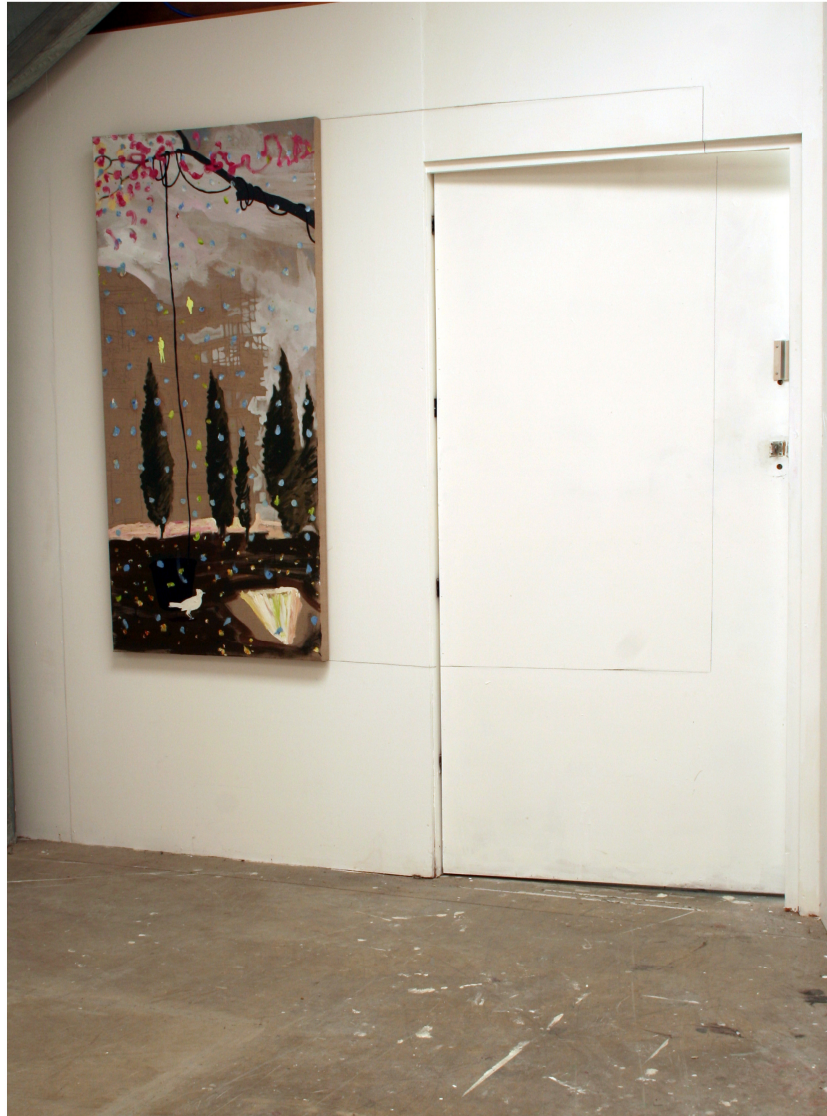


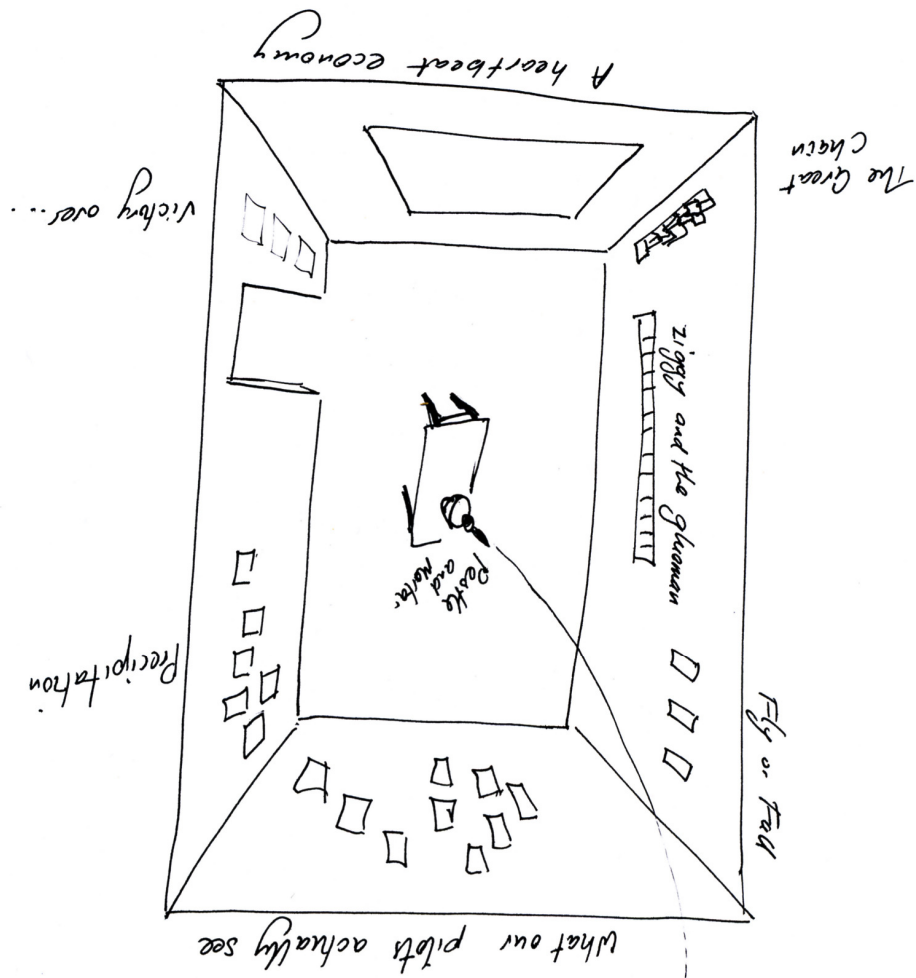
### *Penetrating the Canvas*

A painting hangs near a door. The work is in two states, a solid strip painted on linen and an empty shape defined by a pencil line. The door of the space has a pencil line upon it, the space projected by the canvas that hangs directly by the door. It is a description of an invisible extension of the painting, its actual but unseen dimension extended beyond the canvas surface. Is this a kind of incompleteness or simply an inability to see? Within the paintings a network of pencilled scaffolding, surrounding a baroque architectural structure is visible. It looms out, as if shrouded by fog, a dream wreck dissolving. Figures of workmen seem to float in outfits of golden phosphorescent luminosity. Golden Builders.

There is a right angle relationship between these two areas of incompleteness, one on the canvas, one next to it. Both are shaped by the tentative presence of the pencil mark. That the mark extends on to the wall indicates a fugitive presence, this space will not always be occupied yet it has somehow extended beyond the zone of stasis. The rupture of the door unhinges the plane yet the mind constantly reassembles it.

The viewer is literally able to penetrate this work by opening the door and walking into the room beyond. Bursting through the canvas curtain.





save - feeling  
structure of the  
ill. Vacuum is  
of air not  
by hooks  
ve everything  
interconnecting  
So there it is  
that space  
no movement

### *Pestle and Mortar*

The emblem of the work is the pestle and mortar. The grinding machine of dissolution and recombination, an intimation of the making of a substance of balance and stability. The matter of both paint and ink finds its first existence in the compression space of this apparatus.

Bone black. Burnt bone and ground just so. Then divided by vehicle, the medium that extends beyond conveyance into the conceptual, the expectation of function. So the black stuff is then awarded, through use, different degrees of visibility: a shade shiver of text, cursive blot soak and line, hieroglyph convolution, mark, gesture record, itself; paint, and black, (black?), black.

It is beside voice, and cradled by silence.

A white table with a pale blue, sky blue, bowl sitting upon it. A black cable leads the eye to a microphone, hanging within, but not touching the bowl. The two items suggest a pestle and mortar, the painters tool of grinding; pulverising elements into the minute particles of pigment, making the hard stuff of objects ready for re-arrangement, shaping to will. The white table feels solid and familiar, its outline the three-dimensional form that appears caught in profile throughout these rooms.

These objects also present a sexual tableau, a momentary position of penetration and reception. Is this some kind of conception, an attempt at unification? Two senses of motion are present, the signal carrying, straight cable of the microphone, and the hemi-spherical circlings of the bowl that bends the light, spinning a globe of reflection.

A susurrations emerges between the microphone and the bowl. Strings of words on the edge of some kind of meaning; the rhythm of a forceful conversation. The text becomes recognisable, the Futurist Opera '*The Victory Over The Sun*' performed as a dialogue. The text ground into the air between bowl and microphone.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The recording was made during a performance of the Work by Kit Poulson and Alex Baker in July 2007.



## *Walking*

Walking is movement through the space, but also the movement that runs through the creation of the work. The theme of walking constantly emerges, the path of the pilgrim and the homeless tramp. Is the path taken a shuffle from spot to spot in the work of everyday survival, driven forward and back by the whims of others? Or is it directed, an unrolling of meaning, all lines converging on one desired arrival?

Moving through the space the viewer can perform a kind of exegesis; applying over layered techniques of examination to each set of objects they view. Through the process of constellation the space becomes a series of fugitive emblems, thought patterns forming, extending and dissolving in different time spans.





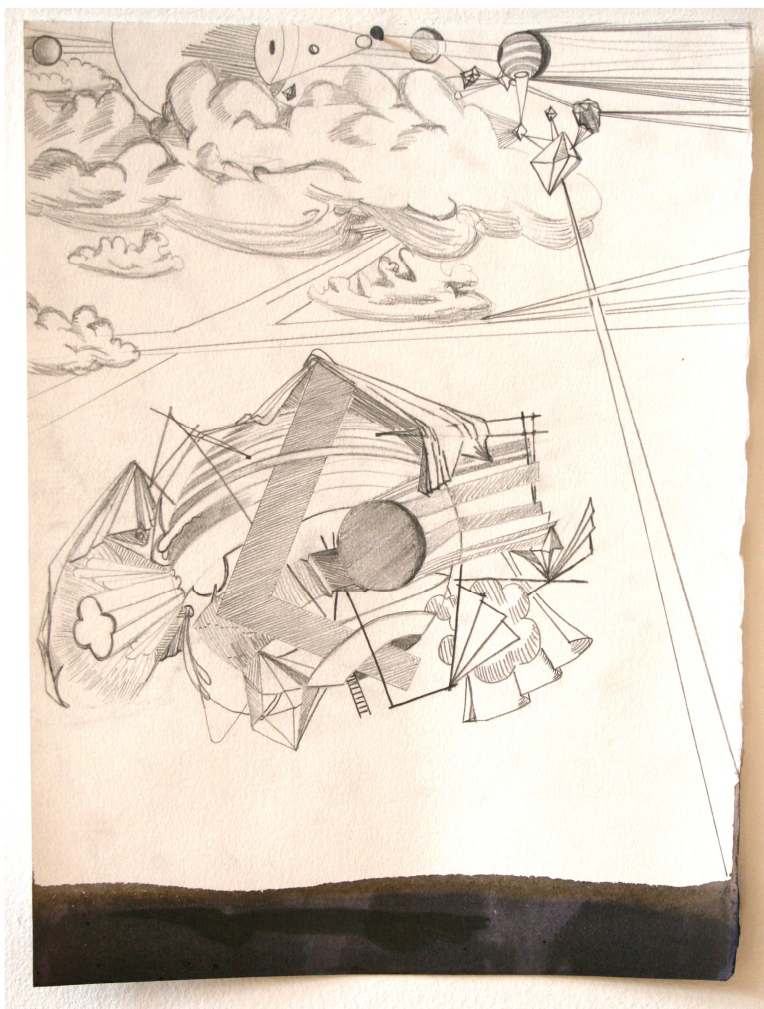
### *What Our Pilots Actually See*

Spanning the corner ahead lays two clusters of drawings, a cloud form. The drawings themselves show a series of events that it is tempting to arrange into a narrative, although the parameters of this are hard to define. Aerial forms negotiate some kind of union; a point of super-saturation, beyond which space falls into crystalline order. Each event encourages a shower of precipitation. Structures congeal from clots of objects, seeming to hang in stasis whilst beams of illumination cast ecliptic shadows as they orbit. The skylscapes are the void above the heavy ink soaked surface, a distillation, each sheet of paper a vertical refinery of ink substance.

Opposite three aircraft are caught, depicted at the precise point of a catastrophic homecoming, an uncontrolled return to the earth. Is gravity reasserted or denied? The movement within each drawing might seem to be clear, a downward rush. But how can we tell from a drawing. There is no movement at all. Save the arrested ink. No futurist lines of force. Is it time itself that has been arrested rather than represented. In this way is the catastrophe averted?

On the end wall hangs a large drawing. A plan of all the movements so far taken, and a premonition of those to come.



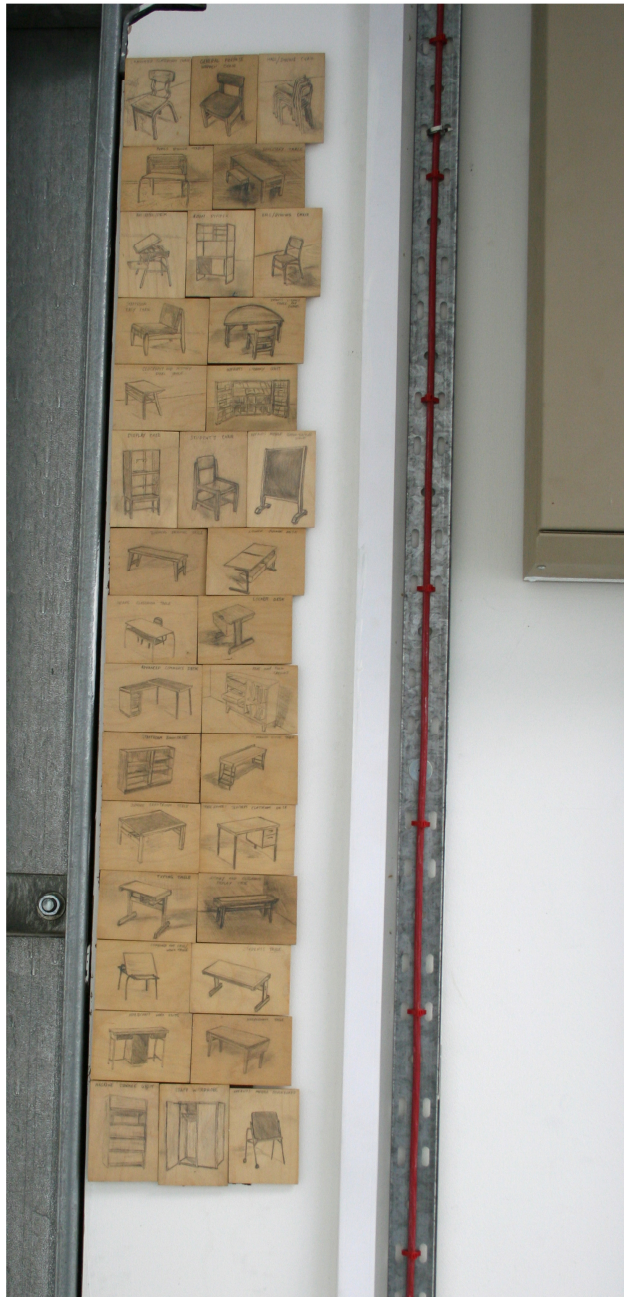


*Talking (spiel)*

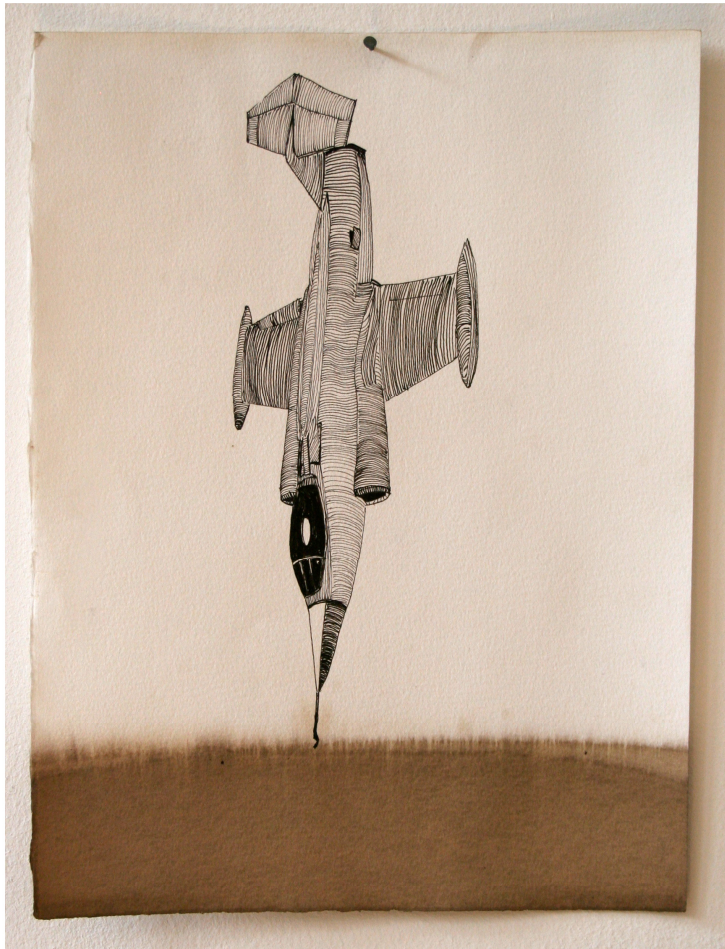
There are moments when all this seems to be part of some endless flowing attempt at persuasion a market traders spiel shifting from jokes to complete sincerity, filling every space to command attention and some personal exchange. Mind full of words that seem to orbit around the picture plane, phrases that refuse to coalesce into longer meaning, yet constantly recur.

Half lost, a work still unfinished, everything existing on one plane.











### *An Object of Apprehension*

This work exists in the space between each of the doorways that allow access to each room.

The cables are elasticated ropes that suspend an object in the centre of the space. The object is formed from two painting stretchers pushed together, between which sits a piece of raw linen. The stretchers are held together by elastic cord that is wrapped tightly around them. The whole artefact is assembled from this array of tensions.

On the wall beside this work a painting hangs, and beside this an image is back-projected onto a screen which matches the scale of the painting exactly. This screen is set flush into the wall, giving the impression that the stuff of the wall itself is soaked with light, a technicolour oil stain. The projection gently shifts between a mirroring of the painting that hangs beside it and an image of one of the panels from the Hawstead Chamber 'Ut Moreris Vives'.<sup>19</sup>

In all these images a skull sits, brain empty, but occupied with other coiling. Sound cables suggest a feedback loop might mimic speech. Branches and leaves coil and recall the story of the green man. The natural world has refilled the voided presence of human occupation. Is this life-fullness different from the skulls previous state as a container of humanity?

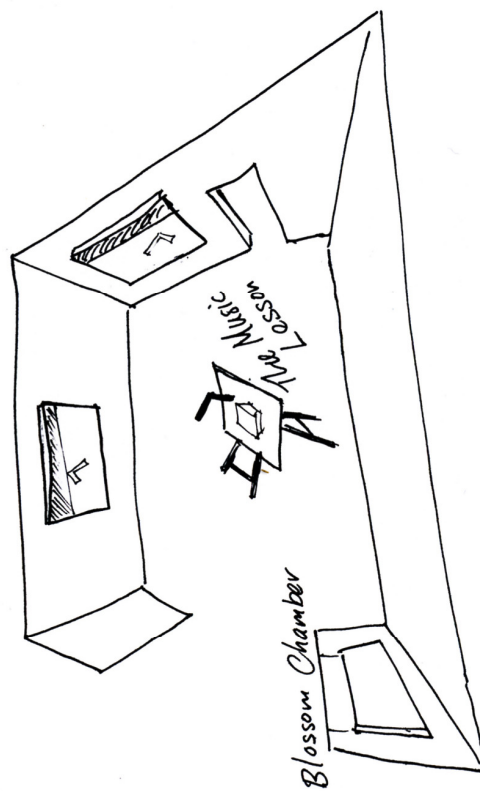
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<sup>19</sup> The Hawstead Panels now sited at Christchurch Museum Ipswich, originally created *circa* 1605. This construction is discussed at length in Volume 2. The panel's motto translates as 'Life through death' It is symptomatic of a sentiment expressed elsewhere by Joseph Hall. "*We have heard of so many thousand generations passed, and we have seen so many hundredths die within our knowledge that I wonder any man can make account to live one day. I will die daily. It is not done before the time which may be done at all times*". Joseph Hall *Vowes and Meditations* Vol II:19 This panel reflects on the conditions of containment, the struggle to align the conception of a conscious eternity with a conscious finitude. The borders that allow for the perception of emptiness and presence are explored through the object of the skull, once the epicentre of an individual's self-reflective amalgamation of past, present and future, and now acting as a plant pot. The interaction of these states is not portrayed as tragic but as necessary.









*A Discussion With The Crow*

*C: What is research?*

*I; What a surprise a talking crow!*

*C: Question and answer?*

*I; What a surprise a talking crow!*

*C: Call and response?*

*I; What a surprise a talking crow!*

*C: The production of knowledge*

*I; What a surprise a talking crow!*

*(pause)*

*C: Does that make you angry?*

*I; What a surprise a talking crow!*

*C: It is already too late for you...*

*I; What a surprise a talking crow!*

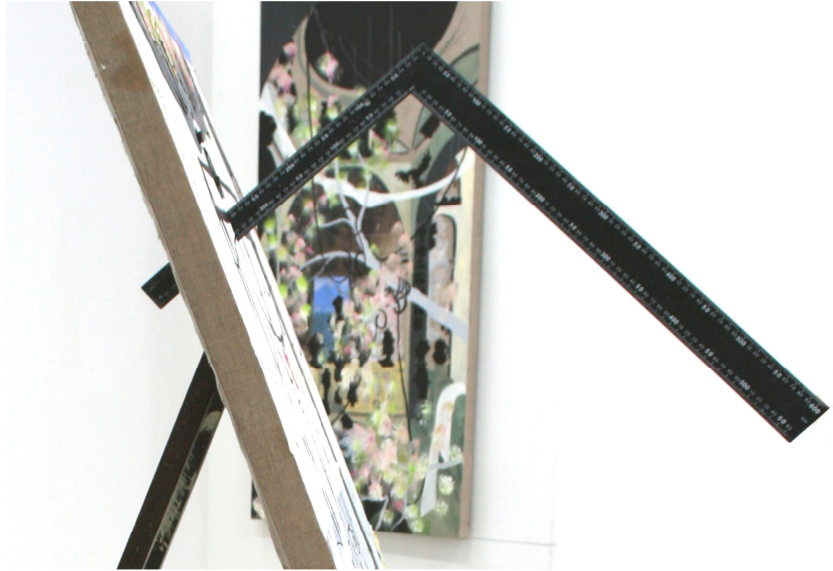
*What a surprise.*

The crow managed to accidentally arrange pebbles so that they seemed to form images and words. After watching for a while I took up my rake and tidied up the garden.



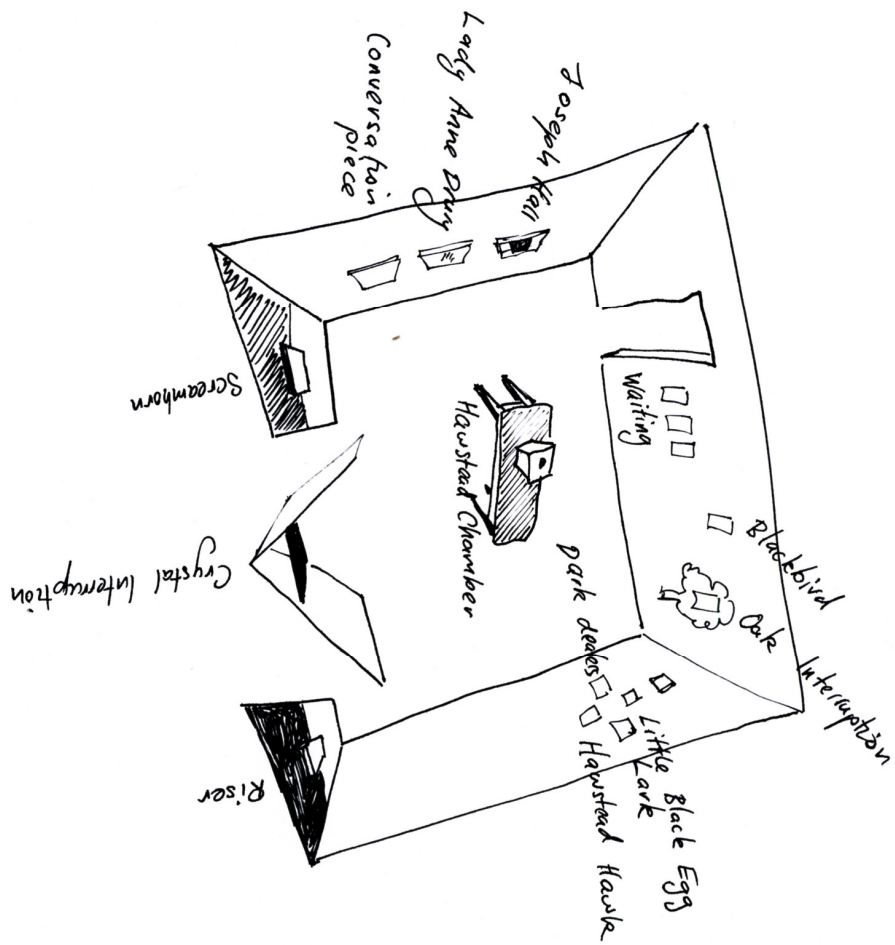








As before in the case of the  
The figure is a personification of the  
The figure is a personification of the  
The figure is a personification of the



### *The Corner*

Through a small door and into a space of constellations. Ahead a high wall, a dark horizon, which seems to either have been pierced or to be pushing out an angled corner form (one wall longer than the other, the ground plan exactly that of the measuring square so prominent in other works in the show). The black horizon on the facing walls is coupled with pencilled outlines, the whole scene a collection of twisting and spinning corners.

The wedge of the work 'Crystal Interruption' forms the corner of one of several rooms that co-occupy this space. It is forced into a space that is spanned by a simple drawing, a suggestion of a continuation of white walls into blackness. On this are hung two paintings, one actually seeming to continue, or perhaps generate the drawing around it. The other's surface is pulverised into dark clagged shards, a side view of the kind of emergence that can be seen with the wedge of the corner adjacent to it.

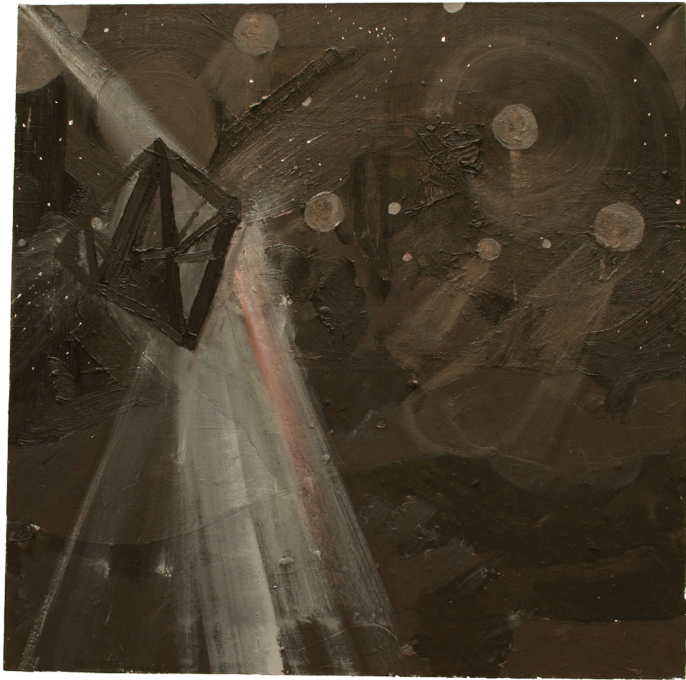
The solidity of the corner formed by the walls straight ahead of the viewer provides a point of convergence, a perspective retreat into the absolute connection of its two angles.

A black square painting cuts across this angle and its body casts a shadow back into this void. On this paintings surface, the paint is clumped and difficult, flows of smooth matt overlain with shiny swirls of glossy impasto. Dots of white stellate. Circular forms seem to throw beams on the ground. A nest of lines becomes crystal and pours out a sheet of light. This does not illuminate, but forms a cloud revealing it's presence through refractions.

The arrangement appears like a stage set, or a tableau. The corner twisted free from any supporting structure, sits in a painted approximation of space. From the point of entrance this arrangement creates a consistent illusion. Beyond the threshold of the door the observer has stepped into the space of the stage. The table and paintings around amass properties, drawing purpose from the narrative energy of this visit.

The position is anxious, exposed. If this is a stage then the viewer must shift from observer, to observer who is also observed. Their role half audience, half protagonist.





















*Half lost...*

*(Chaos and Ancient Night, I come no Spy,  
With purpose to explore or to disturb  
The secrets of your Realm, but by constraint  
Wandering this darksome desert, as my way  
Lies through your spacious Empire up to light,  
Alone, and without guide, half lost, I seek,  
What readiest path leads where your gloomy bounds  
Confine with heaven...) <sup>20</sup>*

Half Lost in an attempt to move towards something undefined, something made present only as an assumption, (the assumption that what is seen is an armature for the unseen). Every journey is given shape, and accretes meaning, in the course of this movement through indeterminacy.

To be lost is an absolute condition, a complete state of unknowing. It is to be without reference, each point undifferentiated from the next. What is it to be 'half lost'? It is to have deliberately placed yourself in this position, to have stripped away meanings from the space around you.

To 'find' a place is a process of negotiation. Reconciliation of the diversity of branching possibility into a focused linear narrative is only possible through the deployment of deliberate occlusions, blurring and shifts of the was and the will be. The manufacture of apparatus that contain such pathways in any media, images, writing or sound demands the establishment of a tension between direction and drift, known and unknown. This is not a tautness tending to stasis but more akin to the movement of an orbital body in the thrall of the unceasing tug of gravity.

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<sup>20</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book II lines 968-976 - Pg 198 Milton, John. *The Complete English Poems*, Everyman's Library, London, 1980.





*And not lost?*

*(Permanent and not lost, not lost nor vanish'd & every little  
act,  
word, work & wish that has existed, all remaining still...  
For everything exists & not one sigh nor smile nor tear,  
One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away.)<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> A description of the City of Imagination, Golgonooza, the simultaneous container of everything. William Blake, *Jerusalem* Chapter 1, Plate 13 line 60- Pg 634 Blake, William. (ed Keynes, G), *Blake Complete Writings*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1966.

*A Skull Placed into a Bucket of Ink.*

This work bracketed the show Lark, acting as an originary point and as a full stop.

A mind placed inside the idea of itself. A skull in a bucket of ink. The bucket is made from black plastic. The black ink completely fills it, right up to the brim. The skull is completely immersed; no part of it is visible.

The ink performs a most perfect description of the skull. It flows around every plane and crevice, fills up each hollow. It contains the skull in totality as the space within itself that it cannot occupy, the space where the ink has been forced apart from itself.

Is this drawing, writing?

The ink is already transforming, it is drying, very slowly. When it has completed this transformation from wet to dry, what will we see? Perhaps the skull lays in the bottom of the bucket also transformed- silted with ink, ink which has soaked deeply into the bone, becoming intermingled.

Do I know whose skull it is? I might place my hand on my face and feel the bone beneath my own features. The touch communicates a shape. I can half make and half hallucinate the image of my own skull extracted and bucketed. The attempt at conversation is difficult, with only one tongue between us. Me skull-less, skull me-less. The ink is silent.

I might place my hand in the ink, to touch and caress the object within it. This occupation forces ink from the bucket, displaced ink running over the edges, down the sides, pooling on the tabletop. With an iron nib I can use my other hand to draw out fine threads of ink, make loops and curves. Draw out the threads into an image, a word.





*VOLUME II*

ARRIVING AT THE SURFACE

# I

## INTRODUCTION

*Introductory Images. Painting a curious art? Ekphrasis as an investigative technique. The structure of the Thesis as a 'Wonder Cabinet'. Attacking the Surface.*

### *Introductory Images*

*The first image is this; a figure stands in front of a picture plane. This is the site of the painting, a space of approach and retreat; a site of multiple events compressed into an object without depth. The second image is this text, hinged outwards as a description of the space, and flattened once again onto the space of the page. The third image is within the space of the reader's mind, their mental return to the first image; a figure stands in front of the picture plane.*

### *The Curious Art of Painting*

Giovanni Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura*, published in Milan in 1584<sup>22</sup> outlined a theory of the practice of painting blending technical advice with moral and philosophical discussion. In 1598 an English translation was produced by Richard Haydocke<sup>23</sup>, and quickly became a standard reference work. Haydocke describes painting as '*The Curious Art*'. He uses the adjective in the archaic sense, 'curious' meaning both unusual and interesting, and also suggesting work of painstaking care; the work needed to understand the unusual (*cura* the Latin root of the word is also the base of the verb '*curate*'). This entanglement of visible craft and embedded arcane thought, still to a large extent characterises considerations of the object of painting. Reaching some mental reconciliation between these elements is also the source of unease that haunts such considerations. Is there a particular '*curiosity*' to the practice of painting, which is different from that found in other registers of expression, such as drawing or writing, or from dance or drama? Where would this quality be found, within the studio or the gallery, within the work or the painter?

No matter what marks it carries upon its ground a painting is always a thought object; a conceptual construction, which, through the creation of a picture plane, opens a view of a space, somehow disconnected from the world around it. This is not some magical aura invested through the mystic action of the artist-creator. It is simply the result of a decision

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<sup>22</sup> Giovanni Lomazzo (1538-1600) was an Italian painter, who began writing after he became blind in 1571.

<sup>23</sup> Haydocke edits and modifies the original text, arguing that some of Lomazzo's ideas are produced from 'Romish Doctrine' and not in keeping with the teachings of the Reformed Church. Lomazzo, Giovanni. *A Tracte Containing The Artes Of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge & Buildinge. Englished By R(Ichard) H(Aydocke)*, J. Barnes, Oxford, 1598.

made by the viewer to regard the object before them as a painting. This might be an individual decision, perhaps the choice of the artist alone or the consensus view of a larger group. This thought space is singular and instantaneous, revealed in one glance as a complete artefact. Yet a closer examination is also demanded. Every part of the surface has been manufactured from a flow of individual decisions; halts, pauses, withdrawals, marks and traces. How can such a space continue to generate interest, to apprehend thought, when it emerges from a resolutely static artefact of stained cloth and wood?

This research project explores some of the characteristics of this plane of disconnection. To do this, it is necessary to avoid definitions based on a negative premise, that this is an ‘un’ area, a zone of otherness, abstraction, uncontainable in language and therefore almost ‘unthought’. It is an attempt to map this curious space, the interactions of sight, image and text.

Within this project, as in the wider world, the object of the painting is in constant danger of becoming confused with the concept of ‘the image’. Paintings are clearly part of the visual realm, but also crucially a specific visual *art*. Each painting is a conceptual and time-based object, manufactured as a presentation of enacted visual thought. The border with other practices is porous, and ultimately the specifics of technique are relevant in the particular context, the argument of the painting that contains them. There is no ontology of technique, only of execution. However in the moments of manufacture the surface of the painting, like that of the page, offers radical possibility. Every moment allows the possibility of constant reinvention.

Although first received within a single glance the painting is a slow image, slow in its execution, slow in its apprehension. The object of the painting distorts and extends the concept of the image, revealing its fluid borders. The painting/image folds around words and around movement and is in its turn enfolded. It becomes the still certainty of mortality and the restless *wanton gaze* of flirtatious seduction.<sup>24</sup>

The mimetic qualities or otherwise of paintings are not widely discussed in this research, as they have received much attention elsewhere. Rather there is a focus on the painting as an active apparatus, a focus for a practice of thought. Here, the picture plane is considered not as a representation, which ultimately seeks to blend seamlessly into the world, but as a

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<sup>24</sup> Hogarth refers to paintings demand for ‘*A Wanton kind of gaze*’. Pg 65 W. Hogarth, *Analysis of Beauty*, Mercier & Co, London 1810. It is interesting to note that Laurence Sterne specifically acknowledged the structure of Hogarth’s work as the model for his seminal meta-text *Tristram Shandy*. For a full discussion see Holtz, William V. *Image and Immortality; A Study of Tristram Shandy*, Brown University Press, Providence, 1970.

presentation of another world, a glimpse of paradoxical conjunction between two supposed totalities.

Each picture plane is necessarily singular and complete in itself, yet also the product of a series of manoeuvrings. Can the 'surface' be considered as a process of thought, which might also exist as the written page just as visual material might be considered as a narrative or a 'text'. If it cannot exist here, now, on this surface, the page, then the image of the figure in front the canvas becomes a reflection, consumed and processed into text-thought and in itself a complete absence; a void of the unknown and unknowable, a place of absolute otherness described only by the flow of text around invisible form. These reflections are then presentations of the edges of this space, presentations of the presumed 'curious' event of the painting. Does the painter, immersed completely within the practice, have a reversed position, a location within this perceived void, or are they too immediately alienated from their own works?

### *The Methods of the Project.*

The rhetorical device 'ekphrasis' describes a process in which one art is expressed through another. In rhetoric it is used to imply a precise description of the visual in spoken words. It literally translates as 'to speak out'. It is through this interpretation that a sense of 'life' is achieved.<sup>25</sup> The state of 'enargeia', when imitation becomes so perfectly rendered as to be indistinguishable from the object of description, was the aim of the rhetorician. Static memory is not enough, it is only through a mobile perspective that knowledge can be revealed and communicated. The rhetorician needs the presence of the artwork to animate their own memory, to connect with the existence of others. The essential relationship is conversational, a recurring discourse, existing between perceptions and memory, rhythm and pattern.

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<sup>25</sup> In his essay *The Problem of Ekphrasis* Murray Krieger gives a history of the term, which he argues, is both exhilarating and exasperating in its possibilities. It is 'to comprehend the simultaneity, in the verbal figure of fixity and flow', A fusing of time and space. He provides three definitions of ekphrasis as a tool of literary criticism. Firstly 'the attempted imitation in words of a plastic object', secondly 'any sought-for equivalent in words of any visual image inside or outside art' to seek to represent beyond the capacity of words as arbitrary signs and thirdly the broadest extension of the principle 'any attempted construction of a literary work that seeks to make it, as a construct, a total object, the verbal equivalent of a plastic art object'.

Krieger Murray *The Problem of Ekphrasis; Image and Words, Space and Time and the Literary Work* Pg 4 in Robillard.V & Jongeneel E. *Pictures into Words, Theoretical and descriptive approaches to Ekphrasis*. V.U. University Press, Amsterdam, 1998.

The critical employment of ekphrasis is an underlying principle of this project; a practice of attempting to shift one media into another to arrive at a vivid dimension.<sup>26</sup> The project occurs on the border at which ekphrasis blurs into emblematic thought. Here image and the text combine into one immediate presence. To approach a description of the space of the show Lark various methods are deployed, each emerging from a defined period of practice; practice which is then folded back onto the surface of the show. The written element of the project is deliberately imagistic and episodic; Its' structure not based on a traditional model of academic writing but organised by applying methods drawn from different practices of visual art.<sup>27</sup> The aim of this research is not only to explore but also to define the methodologies of this exploration as communicable techniques. Within the thesis, image and text are closely entwined. The following paragraphs outline the initial organisational method of this arrangement; The Wonder Cabinet and its links to classical memory theory. It then goes on to describe the practical techniques which are introduced to interrupt and interrogate this organisation; emblematic and Suprematist systems of regard.

### *The Wonder Cabinet*

The overall shape of the project is modeled on a particular genre of painting; the 'Wonder Cabinet' or 'Wanderjammer'. Wonder cabinet paintings enjoyed a great vogue in the first half of the Sixteen Hundreds.<sup>28</sup> These paintings depict a large room that contains a myriad of other objects. The walls are completely covered with paintings, large and small. Statuary stands on every surface. Sets of busts and classical poses, urns and vases sit between the statues. Tables, mantles and shelves are loaded with things; natural curiosities mixed with objects relating to

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<sup>26</sup> *Socrates: 'Writing, you know, Phaedrus, has this strange quality about it, which makes it really like painting: the painter's products stand before us quite as though they were alive; but if you question them, they maintain a solemn silence. So, too, with written words: you might think they spoke as though they made sense, but if you ask them anything about what they are saying, if you wish an explanation, they go on telling you the same thing, over and over forever.'* Plato. *Phaedrus*. (Trans. W. C. Helmbold and W. G. Rabinowitz.), Library of Liberal Arts Bobbs, Indianapolis, 1956.

*In Phaedrus Plato represents the teaching of Socrates as a written dialogue. After this statement on the nature of writing, and Phaedrus's reply ('You are quite right about that too') a positive alternative is offered; the 'living, animate discourse of a man who really knows'. Marks made on paper are simply the ghost of this. It is in the exercise of thought that knowledge is achieved, not in its' representation. The skills of dialectician, the arts of rhetoric therefore become paramount.*

<sup>27</sup> Again it is important to note the possible confusion between discussing more general methods of visual communication and those particularly associated with painting. Once again the border is porous, with self-definition being the most reliable method of divination. An excellent guide to general theories of the visual is to be found in Tufte, Edward. *Envisioning Information*. Graphics Press, Connecticut 1990.

<sup>28</sup> The form is particularly associated with Antwerp in the Low Countries (roughly, present day Belgium). At the conclusion of the Dutch Revolt, Antwerp was one of the major trading centres of the catholic low countries. These paintings reflect the affluence that was beginning to grow after years of war. The exotic objects and blooms depicted display the interconnections of trade with the farthest flung outposts of the world known to Europe.

the arts. Conch shells, skulls and strangely curled horns sit next to maps and drawings, spread on tabletops. Globes, astrolabes and other scientific instruments sit alongside violins and cellos. Great vases of flowers provide bursts of colour, which were impossible in nature, as the stems combined bloomed at completely different times of year.

These paintings are not simply a visual catalogue of an existing collection. They present an ideal. The collection here is not to be viewed as a representation of an accumulation of rarity and value but as an organisation and interrelation of the most outstanding works of man and nature. The collection becomes an educational artefact, a demonstration of the correct way of looking at the world.

The external observer must engage in several actions, several ways of looking when regarding such a painting. They take in the painting as a whole, an image of a room. They regard the people within the room, who like the external observer, are involved in the act of looking at a painting. Immediately these people become a model, an ideal audience, positioned by the painter and subject to the painter's desires. The outside observer is then brought to reflect upon her or his own way of 'looking'. Does it match up to this model? When the paintings within the painting, and the arrangement of objects around them are considered, the external observer becomes aware that there is an interrelationship between theme and subject.<sup>29</sup> This pattern is reinforced by the deployment of the painted connoisseurs who direct with expansive revealing gestures, and permanently fixed sightlines. The eye is drawn along pathways throughout the room. If the viewer cranes forward or leans to one side in order to gain a better view of something within the painted room they gain no further knowledge. The collection is fixed in time and space and they can approach no further. They cannot admire the surface of the paintings within the larger frame without realising that they are observing the surface of the whole. Any approach is flattened out into this, distributed in an agglomeration of tiny illusions, each encouraging a momentary forgetfulness, a momentary suspension of perspective.

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<sup>29</sup> The ultimate focus within many Cabinet paintings is an icon like image of the Virgin Mary which occupies the centre of the room. The viewer is brought to a point of schism. They must make a decision. One kind of image leads to the reality of the Christian revelation through focus on an icon of the divine, which can be sought for in the mind. The second kind are ultimately illusory, a construction of paint, shaped to deceive the eye, with no substance beyond the mundane. However they have a function, they both symbolically and literally surround and support the Iconic Virgin. Through learning how to look at these works the observer also approaches and supports their own vision of the divine. The animals act as a counterpoint, their gaze is empty because without souls they cannot appreciate the divine. This is a warning not to become governed by animal passions, the sinful worldly vices of avarice and pride.



### *A Theatre of Memory*

*'I am certain that I remember forgetfulness, even though forgetfulness obliterates all that we remember.'*<sup>30</sup>

Cabinet paintings function as actualisations of classical theories of memory, in which visualisations of internal mental structures provide a framework for complex thought. In his work on oratory, Cicero provided the most complete exposition of this theory. The technique demands that an individual creates a mental construction, an image of a room of niches and shelves, full of objects and assigns different meanings or qualities to each aspect of this room.<sup>31</sup> By recalling the shape of this room, other aspects come into focus. A person can move through this mental space collecting the associations that had been planted earlier. For Cicero this was a key tool of the rhetorician, allowing a flowing reproduction, a performance and presentation of a complex pre-arranged chain of ideas. He argues that the Art of Forgetting is equally important. That the '*Ars Oblivionis*' should be necessary indicates that Cicero believes that such mental constructions are robust; they do not disappear of their own accord. They must be removed or the mind will become as full of objects as the outside world, as formless and confusing. Memory is not presence alone, but the organisation of presence.

In his work of 1610 *Gazophylacium Artis Memoriae* Lambert Schenckel<sup>32</sup> draws heavily on this Ciceronian tradition, describing a memory practice which begins by visualising a room (*Cubiculum*) where the walls are covered with pictures. When it becomes time for the memory room to be cleared, Schenckel recommends the following visualisation. The '*Pictor*', painter or creator of the room must imagine a group of angry and aggressive men bursting into the space. They carry weapons, and set about destroying the images in the space, flinging them onto the ground and trampling them. Once this destruction has been wrought, the room will be empty and ready to be used again. This scene is depicted in many Cabinet paintings

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<sup>30</sup> Pg 223 St Augustine *Book X 15 Confessions*. Augustine was trained as a Rhetorician, and schooled others in the art. Confessions. Book IX. St Augustine, (trans by Pine-Coffin, R.S). Penguin, London 1961(Latin 398).

<sup>31</sup> Cicero (106 BC –, 43 BC) 'De Oratore' II 64 299-300 For a description of the theory and history of Cicero's memory system, and classical memory theory in general see -Yates, Frances. *The Art of Memory*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London. 1966.

<sup>32</sup> Lambert Schenckel 1547- circa 1603 came from Low Countries, which for his lifetime were engulfed by national uprising and religious war. He published in the Catholic area and at first seems close to the Counter-Reformation, but was later censored as a 'magician'. Francis Yates argues that Schenckel's theories were underpinned by a hidden Neo-Platonism. See Yates *The Art of Memory*, Pg291-292.

that contrast the order of the cabinet room with a scene of destruction either within a painting, or taking place outside a window. Here figures with animal heads (usually asses) can be seen smashing paintings and statues, destroying a collection.<sup>33</sup>

The object of the painting, a theatre of persistence and destruction seems to offer to memory the possibility of spanning the abyss that opens through the action of re-presentation, reflection and alienation. Painting also presents a threat, a prison that might trap the mind in layers of constantly re-occurring fantasy. The object of stasis is alarming and baffling, its seeming closeness revealing a totally alien realm, an unobtainable stillness.

The text '*Arriving at the Surface*' exists as a recollection, which presents a movement through the show '*Lark*'. In this, it becomes part of a well-established practice in writing, in which the action of regarding an image, or of mentally recalling an image, is reported upon. This allows for an attempt to be made to explore the gap between memory and expression, reflection and experience. Theories of painting as particular thought processes developed in tandem with ideas about the practical organisation of memory, and the art of rhetoric.<sup>34</sup> These fields of practice constantly returned to a conception of the physical nature of thought, a movement through internal and external space. The plane of existence manufactured through maintaining and piloting this movement, is a momentary con-fusion of the micro and macro cosmos. Fullness and emptiness.

In the manufacture of a painting, the painter provides an externalised model of memory. The painting itself becoming theorised as a site of recall and forgetting. Paolo Lomazzo makes this connection explicit in his '*Tract Concerning The Curious Art Of Painting*'. Lomazzo describes the mind as divided into understanding, will and memory. Memory allows understanding to function. Haydocke's translation compares memory to a physical container.

*'But because this corporal memory cannot contain all  
things (because it is like a vessel, which after it is full*

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<sup>33</sup> My analysis is heavily influenced by Stoichita who links Schenckel's theories to 'Iconoclastic Asses' within the Wanderjammer genre see Pg 121-122. Stoichita, Victor. *The Self-Aware Image*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1997. These scenes can also in be seen as a part of a sectarian debate around The iconoclastic practices of Protestant believers, and more generally, as a reminder of the frailty of human construction in the face of time. For an extensive discussion of the complexity of attitudes to Iconoclasm see Aston, Margaret. *The King's Bedpost: Reformation and Iconography in a Tudor Group Portrait*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1993.

<sup>34</sup> The 'art' of rhetoric, which in the classical world was universally considered inseparable from advanced knowledge has receded into an arcane practice. The arts of presentation now might be considered with suspicion as attempts to conceal and deceive the true intent of the speaker, rather than to better convey their message.

*spilleth whatsoever by overplus is poured into it) hath need likewise of some help; and principally of the noble art of painting'.<sup>35</sup>*

The space that is made, or suggested by the surface of a painting, and how any viewer apprehends this space allows for a close examination of a practical construction of mental space. The particular qualities of the painting as an object; its' stillness and its' individual relation to maker and viewer create a stage, a zone that projects and influences the space directly in front of it. Dimension and movement are collapsed onto the picture plane. What is presented here? Is it a demonstration of limitation or an intimation of the possibility of a movement beyond such limitations into a different order of perception somehow adjacent to the mundane? The multiple approaches to this space appear to oscillate between two states, promises of emptiness and fullness; the presence or absence of mechanisms of understanding, the communication of knowledge, the direct impact of sensation.

#### *The Thesis as a Wonder Cabinet.*

This research project employs an organisational structure similar to that of the picture plane of a Wonder Cabinet painting. The movement around this space is a set of encounters, brought into relationship by this formal arrangement; the display becomes both an argument and an act of memory.

How can such an arrangement become more than just the accumulation of things? The juxtaposition of visual elements might give rise to the suspicion that there is no further organizing principle than a series of 'shallow' resemblances. This is of course, an explicit issue raised in discussions centred on the impact of post-modern theory.<sup>36</sup> This project seeks

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<sup>35</sup> Interestingly the translator (or Englisher) Haydocke notes that it is impossible to directly translate some of Lomazzo's concepts from one language into another, a problem which has persisted to this day.. Preface Pg2 Lomazzo, Giovanni. *A Tracte Containing The Artes Of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge & Buildinge. Englished By R(Ichard) H(Aydocke)*, J. Barnes, Oxford, 1598.

<sup>36</sup> In contemporary theory such organisation might be classified as a product of ultra relativistic post-modern thinking, in which nothing can be accorded relevance save through the fiction of the author. Thus to those convinced of the power and infinite extendibility of systematic reasoning Lyotard's assertion that there is 'only surface' (Beyond Representation Pg158 Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *Benjamin, A (ed). The Lyotard Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989) becomes a counsel of despair and helplessness, whereas others might argue it is an assertion of deep resilient humanism It is illuminating to note that painting has been described at various times as the ultimate exemplar of both modernism and post-modernism. See for example Greenberg, Clement. *Art and Culture*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1973 and Thistlewood David (ed) *Sigmar Polke Back to Post Modernity*, LUP & Tate Gallery

to place this anxiety within a wider historical context and to argue that rather than a symptom of some recent crisis, this uneasiness is an issue which has been continually articulated in and around works produced by practitioners of painting. The cabinet structure of this project allows the process of research to be articulated on two tiers. Firstly there is the account of the practice undertaken over the course of the project. Secondly there is the account of a number of encounters with specific works, which act as points of reflection, not contained within the specific time of the project. The form of the cabinet allows these two tiers to occupy the same space. The journey through this space is governed by various gestures of authority, directions from one viewing position to another. It is also subject to gaps and interruptions, the awkwardness of translation.

### *Attacking the Surface*

As noted above, the organisation proposed for this project contains inherent problems. The research itself contained elements designed to highlight and perhaps even exacerbate these. The interrelating mechanism of the encompassing ‘surface’ of the Cabinet painting is challenged by two specific historical practices that were explored and utilised in the production of ‘Lark’. The two specific historical events were, the construction of a meditation chamber in Sixteenth Century Suffolk, and the growth of Kasimir Malevich’s Suprematist theory in early Twentieth Century Russia. The disparity of these two dates indicates that this is an unorthodox historical project. Historical context is provided for each only to allow a clear understanding of the particular system described, there is no claim to connect these contexts into an overarching historical narrative although curious links might be asserted.<sup>37</sup>

The characteristics of the two practices can be broadly outlined in the following terms. The meditation chamber is emblematic, immersive, a constellation of parts, non transcendent, grown from a practice of radical doubt. Suprematism is pulverising, orbital, expanding from the space of icons, a transforming practice to break traditional causality.

These instances have been selected because they offer two different and self-contained practices that utilised the surface of the painting as a thought apparatus and sought to extend beyond this. Both were concerned in different ways with the interrelationships between

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Liverpool, Liverpool, 1996. Lyotard’s complex engagement with painting will be discussed in detail later.

<sup>37</sup> For example it might be noted that the ideas of Francis Bacon were influential both to the creators of the Hawstead chamber, to whom he was closely related, and to Malevich who was influenced by the works of Ouspensky whose ‘*Tertium Organum*’ made specific reference to Bacons ‘*Novum Organum*’.

multiple surfaces and how this might be equated to an understanding of perception and consciousness in time.

These practices are deployed and provide dynamics within the space that interrupt and act upon each other. The space of the research project aims to become the surface upon which the viewer practices, once again returning to the first image, *a figure stands in front of a picture plane*.

The image-text 'Arriving at the Surface' is therefore one functional memory of 'Lark'. This investigation reverses critique and shapes it as a Wonder Cabinet. It is an attempt to construct writing through the practices of painting.

The reader must from this point onwards become the viewer. Beyond the immediate contact of eye and text in the zone of peripheral vision, is the extension of the landscape; the space of the coast, towards the Suprematist horizon, memory chambered in the houses of the past and the future. The text flows only as a ribbon blown, twisted and curled by the alterations of air in these places. These approaches to 'Lark' provide a definition of the ground upon which its dimensions may be apprehended. This ground might be likened to the object of the painting itself, existing as the surface allowed by the ground and support which define and hold the picture plane, but do not touch it

## II

### WORK AND WORD

*Standing in front of the surface.*

*How the figure who paints or who writes might apprehend the 'surface'.*

*A description of the figure of the painter, as sad specialist or passionate spectator. The times of painting. The 'surface' as a construction in space-time. The times of writing.*

The first step might be a return (then not a first step at all?), a return to the first image, the figure that stands in front of the picture plane. If we, for a moment, assume that this figure may be identified as a painter how might their position be described in text?

### *Descriptions of the Painter*

In his essay “The Painter of Modern Life (1863)”<sup>38</sup> Baudelaire describes the mental state of artists, as the title suggests with particular reference to ‘the painter’.

*“a fire, an intoxication of the pencil or the brush,  
amounting to almost a frenzy... It is the fear of not going  
fast enough, of letting the phantom escape before the  
synthesis has been extracted and pinned down.”*<sup>39</sup>

What is he trying to catch? A phantom, which is the spirit of the times, to be contained, distilled, made static, fixed for examination. Yet somehow this is also the moment of ‘Modern Life’, the essential nature of which the painter must confront, must be within. Art then is situated precariously at the point of collapse into the relentless un-differentiable presence of the fallen world. The job of the painter is to fight nature and find a regained innocence of imaginative vision, thereby achieving achieve romantic redemption, ‘*Arise Lazarus*’.<sup>40</sup>

This seminal essay is perhaps not so much about painting as about the attempt to write about painting. THE ‘Painter of Modern Life’ must be recognised by the writer of modern life, Baudelaire himself. The unstoppable flow of sight, an attempt to hold with thought something intangible, something which is constantly laid open to perception. The mastery of the hands calls to mind the tension of fingers that grip a pen, writing at speed.

What kind of space does the anxious painter that Baudelaire describes occupy? He shifts and wanders, sketching. The marks he makes are short, cursive, calligraphic, alluding to forms in movement. Always chasing the elusive subject, trying to become part of it but in spite of this desire, perhaps even because of it, remaining an individual, self-contained, the ‘*passionate spectator*’.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life in The Painter of Modern Life and other essays*, Phaidon, New York 1995.

<sup>39</sup> Pg 17, *ibid*

<sup>40</sup> Pg 17, *ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> Pg 9, Charles Baudelaire, *The life and work of Eugene Delacroix in The Painter of Modern Life and other essays*, Phaidon, New York 1995.

*“Outside of their studios what do they know? What do they love? What ideas have they to express?”<sup>42</sup>*

Baudelaire laments the lack of intelligence among visual artists. They show no interest in religion, poetry, and science. In contrast to the ‘*passionate spectator*’ the painter of modern life, they are, by and large, at best ‘*sad specialists*’.<sup>43</sup> They are defined by the special space they occupy, the space of the studio. We can see Baudelaire’s model expressing different modes of being in space. To him the positive model of the painter is one of mobility, unattached, a synaesthete, (a dextrous synathlete), aware of the ‘*spiritual condition*’<sup>44</sup> of the times where “*arts aspire if not to take one another’s place, at least reciprocally to lend one another new powers*”.<sup>45</sup> This individual becomes intermixed into the flow of the time they inhabit. In opposition to this is the occupation of the studio, a space defined by artisan expertise, static and divided from the flow of life.

Francois Lyotard’s approaches to the subject have been described as a reinvention of Baudelaire’s Painter of Modern Life.<sup>46</sup> To Lyotard the painter can occupy a peculiar and special position, which is somehow resistant to the totalizing power of the dominant and invasive language of capitalism.

Lyotard found that his own encounter with painting could not be contained within his writing. In his reflections on the work of Sam Francis he made this comparison,

*‘Painting is an art of fire, a pyrotechnic. This is why it is an art of time, but of an other time, that of fireworks.’<sup>47</sup>*

Thus the activity of painting becomes a parabola of construction, ignition, conflagration, explosion and exhaustion. Paintings interrupt and vitalise but do they carry any knowledge

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<sup>42</sup> Pg 45 *ibid*

<sup>43</sup> Pg 45, *ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> Pg 44, *ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> Pg 44, *ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> For example in ‘*The Assassination Of Experience By Painting-Monory*’ (French 1984). Black Dog, London. 1998. For a discussion of the comparison made with Baudelaire see the introductory essay by Sarah Wilson ‘*Lyotard/Monory Post modern romanticism*’. Lyotard constructs a thematic monograph of the painter Jacques Monory, tracing his works from the sixties to the then present (1984). Again the work seeks to identify the relationship of the painter to the world in which he exists. Whilst Baudelaire’s work exuded a restless energetic anxiety, Lyotard’s tone is redolent with melancholy, a lament. Although in some ways using a similar model of space, this work in part implies a reversal of Baudelaire’s judgements.

<sup>47</sup> Pg 46 Jean Francois Lyotard, *Sam Francis Lesson of Darkness... like the paintings of a blind man*, Lapis Press, California 1993. See also “It is essential that the entire erotic force invested in the simulacrum be promoted, raised, displayed and burned in vain. It is thus that Adorno said that the only truly great art is the making of fireworks; pyrotechnics would simulate perfectly the sterile consumption of energies in *jouissance*” Pg 171 *Acinema*, in *The Lyotard Reader*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989.



beyond this, or is this pyrotechnic trajectory enough? Their function becomes the preservation of a site of irreducible difference

*“The objects of ordinary life are disassembled, carried off, dissipated in the emulsion of their chromatic truth. The absolute eye separates off, distinguishes all the timbres and harmonics of a percussion sound. But ‘absolute’ never takes place and ‘all’ is only very far ahead, far beyond the threshold at which white or black blindness usually commences. ‘All’ means: many steps risked in a forbidden zone. Many will have to be begun again, all begun again each time, try and try again.”<sup>48</sup>*

Perhaps the flash of the firework, the arrow that momentarily cleaves the air will leave an afterimage drifting and fading across the surface of the eye, a tiny point of sight physically apprehended, carried from one body to another, from spark hand to eye? Firework time.

The actions of painting and of writing may catalyse each other, yet the artefact that is produced is not stable. To exist within the space between practices demands dynamism, an interrupting trajectory that is hard to sustain. The mechanisms of persistence, once learnt, harden into formalism, a falling back into the expected.

*“...a struggle is launched between the will to see all and forget nothing and the faculty of memory which has formed the habit of a lively colour, and of silhouette, the arabesque of contour...”<sup>49</sup>*

The attempt to describe the figure in front of the picture plane has become confused. Is it really a painter, or perhaps a writer, a poet, a philosopher or even a monk?<sup>50</sup> It is apparent that in order to proceed further a structure needs to be established which describes how such

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<sup>48</sup> Pg 44 Jean Francois Lyotard, Sam Francis Lesson of Darkness... like the paintings of a blind man, Lapis Press, California 1993. There is a strong echo of Samuel Beckett in this statement, which can also be discerned in Deleuze’s book about Francis Bacon *‘The Logic of Sensation’*. The Beckett text, which most explicitly concerns painting is the essay ‘Three Dialogues’ (1949). Here Beckett reflects on his own creativity through imagined dialogues with three artists. In his dialogue with Van Velde he states ‘to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living’ Pg 145 Beckett, Samuel. *Disjecta*, John Calder, London. 1983.

<sup>49</sup> Pg 16, *ibid*.

<sup>50</sup> Lyotard once avowed that his first choices of career were as a painter or a monk or a historian, an incapacity for celibacy and poor memory lead him into philosophy

multiple possibilities may be accommodated. Lyotard himself provides an analysis, which describes something of the framework for such a multiple encounter.

Lyotard developed several approaches to painting, which although not an attempt to produce a consistent grand theory, amounted to a consistent approach; to describe the 'surface' and transforming devices that occur upon it<sup>1</sup>. The operations of the surface are explored extensively in the essay '*Beyond Representation*'.<sup>51</sup>

For Lyotard the 'surface' becomes a crucial site in which the world, or the work may be 'encountered'. In '*Beyond Representation*' he asserts of artworks

*'they are not in place of anything; they do not stand for, but stand; that is to say that they function through their material and its organisation. Their subject is nothing other than a possible formal organisation (not an inevitable or necessary organisation) and it conceals no content, no libidinal secret of the work, whose force lies entirely in its surface. There is only surface'*.<sup>52</sup>

Is this a surrender of all meaning to a constant flux? Later in the same essay Lyotard asserts that 'Art History' is a plane 'without continuity', and that '*causality is an echo of the pathos of guilt*'.<sup>53</sup>

Rather than emptying purpose from art, this exercise attempts to restore a sense of its actual function, which Lyotard consistently recognises. It attempts to adjust the practices of regarding art, by removing the distorting structures and the accumulations of 'meta-narratives', which have been attached to these practices, and which deny people access to their own experience. This approach falls into a persistent tradition of 'reform' the explicit management of the encounter with the work, which winds from iconoclastic theory to the manifestos of the twentieth century avant-garde. The details of the operations of the moments of encounter become crucial in understanding such exercises as something beyond negation.

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<sup>51</sup> Originally written in French in 1974 as an introduction to '*L'Ordre Cache de L'Art*' by Anton Ehrenweig. In this essay Lyotard extends his use of Freud's concept of the libido adapting it to an account which also describes a 'post-modern' landscape.

<sup>52</sup> '*Beyond Representation*' Pg158 Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *Benjamin, A (ed). The Lyotard Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* Pg166

In his 1984 essay on the work of Barnett Newman *Newman: the instant* Lyotard proposed that painting might be considered as a series of 'times'. These 'times' are not divisions into within a strict sequential process. They might better be thought of as overlapping space/time events that occur around the instance of the painting.

He attempts to describe and name the simultaneous times of painting and accentuate the interrelation of the time and space of the artwork, artist and reception of the work. The space/time of art and artist, that Lyotard describes, is based on a sense of multiple centres, of life formed, not in relation to a central truth, but around 'economies' of energy. To Lyotard the artist has a privileged position, a different relationship to their libidinal energy. The production of the work '*reveals life*'.

Lyotard codified these times as:

*The time of production*, the time the painter takes to paint the picture.

*The time of consumption*, the time of looking and coming to an understanding of the painting.

*The time to which the work refers*, a moment, a scene, a sequence of events. *The time of the story told by the picture*, the time of diegetic reference.

*The time of circulation*, the time the painting takes to reach the viewer.<sup>54</sup>

To Lyotard the final 'time' is cryptically the '*time the painting is*'. This is the time which was later in the essay referred to as the '*plastic instant*'.<sup>55</sup> The time of what is recounted and the time taken to recount it are condensed to this '*linear, chromatic and rhythmic*' instant, and this is the painting. The definition is problematical. How can an 'instant' become linear? Is this a kind of loop or a series of interconnected instances? Lyotard writes that although it may be simplistic, this approach does crucially allow for the isolation of different 'sites of times'. He is attempting to develop a language which can at least begin to frame More clearly, the problems inherent within its' own deployment.<sup>56</sup>

Baudelaire and Lyotard present different versions of the figure of the painter, and through these, describe different ideas about how the 'surface' of the painting might be understood as an artefact within its own curious time. To Baudelaire this time is the attempt to arrive and somehow capture the passage of the moment of the present, which he equates, with recognition of life itself. Lyotard's figure exists amidst multiple considerations. The painter

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<sup>54</sup> Pg 240 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Newman: the Instant* in *The Lyotard Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

<sup>55</sup> Pg 244 *ibid*.

<sup>56</sup> Pg 240 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Newman: the Instant* in *The Lyotard Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

here is not so active, not seizing life but creating gaps in apparent reality to allow the recognition of life.

To follow these steps is to perform a kind of exegesis. This exegesis is akin to the work of the astronomer who in a constant act of observation, comparison and triangulation, attempts to discern recurrent relationships and patterns in the infinitely shifting sky. What connection can be made between these two? To attempt to light a rocket and hold onto its stick.

### *The Times of Writing*

*'This painting shaped thought text attempts to unfasten the chains of words in their gloomy progress towards the authoritarian sulk. Of course in doing so it courts the traditional disasters of 'dumb' art; meaningless relativism and 'like becomes is' only through similitude. Yet these dangers are no less or more debilitating than the pretensions of the writings of Philosophy or Science.'*<sup>57</sup>

An account of the thought processes in composing this particular piece of writing would need to contain a series of points of unawareness. Perhaps these are absences, pauses, and emptiness. Or they might be understood in a more active mode as reversals, removals and replacements. The emergence of extensions and qualifications is dependent on the structure of previous events. The sense of passage within the writing is both emerging as the text itself advances, dictating a form, and also in some interior mind space.

Physical absences occur, a sudden walk to the window or to the park, to the kitchen and to water the houseplants. This breaking may feel almost compulsive, a sudden rejection of one activity and immersion in another. A moment of fugue, a forgetting, a state of being half lost, which allows for the construction of complexity. These are the *'times'* of writing.

Each passage of writing emerges with the hesitations of speech and the revisions of sketching. Such looping pathways must be made apparent to construct a map of the paragraph revealing its composition over time. Yet would such a map provide a more complete 'knowledge' than any finally decided upon and edited 'finished' version? Many steps are taken; movements out and in of this place here? Here? Here again and here also. The performance of writing exists as a rehearsal for the performance of reading. The writer reshapes and edits, asserts control over moment and material. The moment becomes both parallel to a progress of pattern in time and also inseparable from an attempt at completeness, a simultaneous revelation.

So?

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<sup>57</sup> Louis Louie *FankFink (talking like a Dudman)* No Publications, Felixstowe, 1967. (*invented book*).

*...My own entanglement is a tongue-twisted, right back to talk to myself, outside in; to translate myself. The viewers tongue is my own, but voice and tense are uncertain, this is a slippage into a place without authority...*

So these approaches and retreats in painting and writing are also found in the act of regarding, the practice of thinking in front of the work. Is this a monologue or a conversation? It becomes a conversation though an act of ekphrasis. The following passage is a description of this process as made manifest through a visit to a painting show.

*Approaching the Gallery, A First Person Account.*

*On entering the white cube space of the gallery it is noticeably cooler than outside, not cold but a steady comfortable temperature. The light inside feels soft and filtered, it seems to emerge from the air rather than travel through it. There are a few people in the large space, but all move around quietly, responsive to the collective desire to maintain a peaceful ambience.*

*The space is outwardly calm, but my interior state is fervid. I feel a mix of desire and duty. On entering this space I am anxious to consume the works, glancing around, a quick scan to acquire an overall impression, two rooms, maybe three? Urgent thoughts arise, should I go there first, or there? Approach the large work; see these on the way out?*

*This initial panic settles and a left to right circumnavigation begins, turning to the work nearest the door, a moment of pause before plotting further action. So even while in front of this work a part of me is trying to move to the next. In the background a noise, a voice? "Lets get this over with, eaten up, finished. Move on to the next thing".*

*Another part of me is attempting to focus on the work before me. The energy of the anxious approach is immediately transferred into anxiety of comprehension. What is going on here, what materials, what image, a quick glance to see if there is a title, a date, a description of materials. A moment of awareness of my position, too close, too far away, perhaps blocking somebody else's view?*

*Focus, the painting can rush on to me now.*

*Such is the desire to experience the painting that it seems to engulf itself, the rush of responses tumbling over each other, a conceptual synaesthesia; what colour is that?...thin...who is that?...linen...how old?... Belgian.*

*A space/colour/edge an arrangement, blocks, quotations; is that a joke or meant for real?*

*I see all this first through the lens of my ego, my desire, what I want. What I feel needs to be achieved by a painting. I persistently ask 'Is there any room for my work, for my viewing?\_' Yet I am fascinated, drawn into further consideration by this selfishness, as it indicates some commonality, some kind of adjacent development, even if I should prove to be redundant, less skilled than this artist. At least I can know that.*

*(A painting of a skull in a bucket of Ink? My work paint clot on split board? What association save through naming one.)*

*Do I like this painting, how does it fit with all the other works I have seen? How would I have handled this? Immediately judgements are made; that is wrong, that is right, old, new, clever, clichéd. Yet how assured are these judgements? They seem to be underwritten by an anxiety, act quickly and get it over with, decided wrapped up, put away. The texts, the images, the show all seem to agree. We can say 'this is painting about painting' and be satisfied that we have done our work, given enough to get our reward. Can I go now?*

*Already moving on to the next work and the next, at this rate I will be out of the door in five minutes. The urge to consume quickly to consume all the works is strong, as if a complete combination of them will produce an overarching impression, a truth that unlocks each individual work.*

*This desire cannot be fulfilled in this way. The inquiry is too bound by its' own form to produce any answers, and the pressure of desire distorts. The examination of one painting edges out thoughts of another. The circular dialogue generates frustration, tantalising without satisfaction. Whilst at a different level, behind or beneath, maybe above a steady drip, a seepage of perception that continues to flood the body with impressions.*

*My progression seems to be slowing, my anxiety lessening. Perhaps I am acquiring perspective, moving away from myself, allowing things to be simpler, allowing the paintings to belong to someone else. The movement between the works is no longer a regular hungry tick, but sporadic. It is subject to halts, repeats and reverses.*

*At this point my earlier impressions are discarded. They seem to be misguided. A blinkered partial account. Was I more interested in what I felt others would expect me to think? I feel less defensive, even uninhibited. And now is the time to confidently stride around the gallery, to swoop in close to the surface, and then take the longest view, balancing works one against the other. Now time is forgotten. Leave? Where to? Why?*

*I feel separated from the work, I do not complete it, but it is complete. A pause, a point of balance.*

*Should I go now? Should I take a card, an image to aid memory, a piece of text to fix the name, and then check out other shows, future work? Was the past work well known? Why didn't I know about? Was it an influence on this or that person?*

*These are gentler anxieties, more like musings. They signal the gradual re-emergence of specifics, of grammar. Statements begin to form, the synaesthetic rush unjumbled, and given retroactive meaning. The work is placed, into an internal archive. It may maintain an individual identity, or meld into a group or 'type' of work judged similar.*

*Time to go, pull the heavy door, step outside.*

*So what was that about?*

*I examine the gallery's literature. Someone writes that above all the paintings 'are about paint and its infinite potential, about the activity of painting, and about what painting can be and represent'.<sup>58</sup>*

*I am not happy with this and try to frame a different formulation.*

*Above all the paintings were/are paintings, they were/are paint, they were once wet now they are dry. They are a construction of limitations produced by an individual.*

*I was introduced to them in the gallery. And for a moment I was lost, in a reverie, in a space, unstuck, from the structure that now returns and closes over me.*

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<sup>58</sup> Quotation from a press release for exhibition Michael Borremans *The Performance* Parasol Unit, London, April 2005. This report is an amalgam of several gallery visits in that month none of which contained the work 'A Skull in a Bucket of Ink'.



These first attempts to describe the figure, the figure who paints, writes, regards these activities, become descriptions of movements towards or around the space in front of the object of the surface. This does not describe the surface itself, but locates it as a site of potency. This then leads to a question, how does this 'curious' place exist concurrently with the world around it?

# III

## THE MATERIAL SURFACE

*The surface as the picture plane*

*Several different accounts of the nature of the surface as an object. A close examination of the construction of the paintings ground. The empty painting, the surface as a trap, the surface that surrounds the viewer, the surface of a fountain, Collision, The full painting.*

### *The Surface as the Picture Plane*

The following chapter attempts to describe the picture plane as a material surface that generates a conceptual space. The matter of this investigation, the substance of the ground and of the mark provides the first entrance into the space of the work.

*Let Us Proceed To Deal With The Matter As Painters.*<sup>59</sup>

*“If many lines are joined closely together like threads in cloth they will create a surface. A surface is the outer limit of a body which is recognised not by depth but by width and length, and also by its properties”*

*Alberti, On Painting 1435.*<sup>60</sup>

The first step is to create a support, the sub-structure of the painting. It may consist of a wall; a panel of wood, metal or glass but currently it is most frequently identified with canvas stretched on a framework of wood or aluminium. The artist has already made many decisions. The size and mobility of the work are decided at this point and this will dictate the desired locations (and by extension the audiences) to which the work will be exposed. In making this choice the artist will be referencing a catalogue of memories of the shapes, sizes, display and locations of work they have previously seen.

Historically canvas gained its popularity as a support because of its flexibility. A canvas could be removed from the substructure, rolled and stored or transported. It was the technology of backdrops for travelling players, appropriated by art.

The process of stretching is not now generally regarded as easily reversible. Museums and galleries would not consider such an action; it would be seen as potentially damaging to the work, an act of vandalism.<sup>61</sup>

Consequently the ‘ideal’ canvas presents an immovable surface on which the picture plane exists. The framework should not warp over time but continue to hold the surface flat. The

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<sup>59</sup> Pg 52 Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*, Penguin, London,. 1991. (Latin 1435).

<sup>60</sup> Pg 38 Bk1 Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*, Penguin, London,. 1991. (Latin 1435).

<sup>61</sup> However artists are often forced by lack of space or finance to roll up works that had yet to become fixed by marketable value.

material should retain its tautness, but not become over-tight and produce cracking. The surface should remain perpetually unchanged.<sup>62</sup>

When a substructure has been constructed, the nature of the material stretched over it can vary greatly; cotton canvas is creamy white whilst linens are tawny. The weight of the fabric will influence the surface. Too fine and it could ‘cockle’ when worked on, introducing waves and bumps onto the picture plane. Too rough and it will cause too much friction to drag a brush over. If the canvas is not laid evenly on the support the lines of its weaving will distort and influence the manner in which the paint lies upon it. Linen has longer fibres than cotton and therefore produces a different sensation to work on. It is widely assumed that the canvas should be stretched onto its support to achieve a ‘drum-like’ tautness.<sup>63</sup> Several devices exist for achieving this in the first place, or for restoring it later. No part of the picture plane, except its’ outmost edges should be in contact with the support beneath. Priming, the preparation of the surface of the support, continues this process of separating the picture plane from the actions of the world.

The surface must be ‘sized’. The most frequently used size in oil painting is ‘hide’ or ‘rabbit skin’ glue. The glue tightens the material, pulling the weave of the canvas together, literally changing its size. It also seals the surface of the canvas. The material is given a fine, transparent, slightly glossy coat. If this were not applied the oil from the paint would rot the canvas causing fairly rapid decay. Acrylic primers and sizes have been developed to mimic these functions. In choosing a particular ‘system’ of priming the painter has again made a series of decisions that will have a major impact on the work. The manner in which the size is applied, its dilution, whether it is to be sanded, the number of coats, are vital to how the painting behaves. The size soaks and stiffens the material. The process of application will leave brush-marks and splashes, which initially invisible may become obvious when dry. These marks cannot be removed only accepted or concealed. Each action will leave its mark. Even brushing the canvas with cold water alone will produce its’ own subtle trace.

The size is the base level of the priming, above this lays the ground. This is often seen as the point of separation, at which the painting itself begins, the formal border. It has become common practice to apply a uniform white ground over the whole area of the front of the canvas, although the ground could equally well be used to describe a surface primed only

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<sup>62</sup>The theory of art preservation is as given to claims of potency and changes of fashion as that of medicine. Both seek eternal health in the face of decay. Previous techniques, once orthodox, come to be seen as crude almost criminal, the cause of destruction rather than its cure.

<sup>63</sup> One maxim was that a glass marble dropped on the centre of the canvas should bounce back up six inches over the surface.

with glue, or not primed at all. It is formed by the decision to delineate it. Functionally the ground can provide different variations of gloss or matte, absorbency or hardness. It might contain brush marks or be gesso smooth. Light penetrates oil paint. Whether it is reflected back or absorbed is dependent on the nature of the ground. Thus a painting can suck light in, or light can seem to radiate out of it.

The light penetrates to the ground because the paint is formed from very finely ground powder (pigment) evenly distributed in a near translucent medium, such as linseed oil, which hardens to fix the powder where the artist disposes it. These pigments are the basis of all colour in paint; as near pure, unfading colour as it is possible to achieve. A wide variety of processes are undertaken to obtain and manufacture these substances. Naturally occurring materials such as lapis lazuli provide a blue obtained by grinding the precious stone. Other colours were the product of processes of development. Indian yellow was originally created by feeding mango leaves to cows and collecting their urine. In the Eighteenth century Prussian blue was synthesized, an accidental by-product of alchemical exploration. For the first time quantities of colourfast blue began to appear in artist's palettes. Chemists have developed more industrialised means of producing pigments at cheaper prices.

Each of these powders has its' own characteristics, its' own reactions to the elements around. Their drying times, toxicity, weight and intensity are mediated through the introduction of stabilizing elements; oils, gums, resins and emulsions.

Before even attempting what might be considered the first mark on the 'virgin canvas' the painter has already made numerous decisions. A decision has been made to define and limit the picture plane; perhaps a stage has been created, or maybe it would be more useful to think of something being uncreated, unwanted influences removed from the curious area defined by the structure of the painting.

The painter now occupies a dual position, able to exist on the ground as well as stand outside as an observer. At this point the picture-plane is porous. However eventually a decision is made that the piece is finished. The picture-plane will then become sealed. Traditionally a layer of varnish would be applied; this would both protect the surface and also create an impression that the painting remains wet.

Beyond this point the work and the artist retreat. Painting and artist are sealed off from one another and the painting begins to function as a memory of form.

In the first stages of creating a painting, two senses of 'the ground' emerge. One a boundary, which makes an isolated picture plane, the other the necessary physical grinding of elements: stones, metals, and resins into fine powders. Through this action the pigment powder becomes malleable and interchangeable. Once these processes have been undertaken a special area is created. It is at once marginal, in that its' identity is a fragile yet potent illusion. A strip of fabric or board defies the temporal world. This is a reversal a reversion to primal elements, changing the nature of objects, separating them from their existing form and, through grinding, reforming them and fixing them into an intimation of new forms.

At the same time the process is constantly undone; complex reactions and decay set in. Colours fade and varnish blooms. The object of the support, subject to the constant flux of the world, gradually erodes beneath the surface. The scythe penetrates the picture plane.

*Lets Us Proceed To Deal With Paintings As Matter.*

Has the artist paused, the hands hesitating... distracted... regarding the matter ground between these two surfaces. Within this space what influence can the hand/thoughts exercise? This is a precarious position to occupy, the edge of irrelevance, impotence, indeterminacy. A passage from my own sketchbook describes this uncertainty.

*I remember looking at paintings and feeling a sense of foreboding. It could occur both when viewing my own work, and looking at the paintings of others. It was as if I were experiencing a premonition, an oncoming darkness. This fear was always triggered by a too close consideration of the paintings presence as a physical object. A question would spring into my mind. The question was always the same, 'What will happen if one day I can only see this painting as a piece of stained canvas, the paint a dried fixed powder, and that is all. A historical document. No vitality, no power. Where will that leave the painting? Will it be any different from a chair or table? Where will that leave me?'*

*Maybe I only felt this fear because all along I knew that it was what I really felt to be true. And so, accept that there is nothing but materials arranged, ageing, fading, celebrated or ignored, simple, abject, open and available. In the face of unavoidable catastrophe every painting is the decision not to cease but to act.*

*That fear of emptiness has disappeared- in fact this sense of emptiness has become something important in itself, something to be cherished.*

*(Annotation in Sketchbook 2005).*



*An Empty Painting?*  
*'Painting Turned Around' by Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts.*<sup>64</sup>

This is a painting of the object of the painting. A presentation of the structure, which lies beneath and supports the picture plane, the apparatus of its delivery. The painting sits on the ground with its back facing the viewer. Is it perhaps waiting to be hung? The viewer freed from the formal demands of the gallery might well approach and reach out to turn the painting around to discover its surface, and at that moment realise their mistake.

This work presents the viewer with a meticulous rendition of the back of a painting, a highly effective trompe l'oeil. The viewer sees an image, but it is the image of what they cannot see, the back of the painting. The immediate response must be to reach out and turn the canvas over, to view the 'right' side. Of course this is impossible, all that will be revealed is another back, although this one is a 'real' back.

The replication of the canvas suggests an accurate reproduction of its own reverse, and in doing so draws attention to the role of the artist, of memory and the skill of the hand. At no point can the artist have been able to regard both the front and back of the painting simultaneously. So either the image is a fiction, transposed from a different canvas, a convincing deception, or the artist has carried in their mind the impression of the rear of the support and mark by mark reassembled it on the opposite side.

The image of the reverse of the canvas has been atomised and then brought into a unified plane. It is arrested at a single moment; a shadow falls from the left, a label (inscribed 36) curving upwards slightly, is attached with a blob of wax.

This carefully rendered note is a further complication of the form of trompe l'oeil, a piece of paper stuck onto the surface of the canvas that doubles the illusion of the actual position of this surface.<sup>65</sup> Here the note shows the mark of a collector or dealer, indicating the work has found a place in the world of art. However this is undermined, the label is false and is pulled into the illusory surface that seems able to absorb everything. The viewer is left with the

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<sup>64</sup> *'Painting Turned Around'* 1670-5, Oil on Canvas 66 x 88cm, Copenhagen National Museum. Gijsbrechts (1610- post1678) was born in Holland and worked in Germany and Denmark. In Victor Stoichita's exploration of 'meta-painting'. He presents 'Painting turned around' as the ultimate expression of cultural explorations of 'De Nihilo' the 'quasi-obsession of the seventeenth century. Pg. 268-279 Stoichita, Victor I. *The Self Aware Image*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1997. For an account of the life and work of Gijsbrechts see Koester Olaf, *Painted Illusions, The Art of Cornelius Gijsbrechts*, National Gallery, London, 2000.

<sup>65</sup> The deployment of such notes is discussed Pg123-144 Battersby, M. *Trompe L'oeil, the Eye Deceived*, Academy Editions, London 1974.



uncomfortable notion that they lack reality and position. They are excluded from the 'real', which this work intimates, exists on its other side.

'*Painting Turned Around*' briefly extends the hope that a moment experienced might become totally known, and contained within 'understanding'. Then it mocks this assumption. The painter cannot shape the object of the painting to apprehend even the thing that is closest to it; its' own substance, its' own back. Only through fiction and invention can the experience of the world in time be compressed into the semblance of a form.

The seemingly arid space of the paintings' reverse has become a site of operation for artists. The reversals practiced by the painter Francis Bacon provide an interesting example.

*The Surface as Flesh*  
(*Constructing a Face: Francis Bacon in Front of the Mirror*).

*"As an artist you have to, in a sense, set a trap by which you hope to trap this living fact alive, how well can you set the trap? Where and at what moment will it click?"<sup>66</sup>*

Look in the trap.

In a Bacon painting is the paint flesh? Is it meat? It can be thought of in another way. Perhaps the paint remains as paint, the artist unable to work the deceitful transubstantiation.

Bacon's canvases are constructed in a very particular way, a technique he discovered early and utilised for the rest of his life. He painted on the back of primed linen. This produced a rough slightly absorbent surface, Bacon's preferred texture to work on; but there is something more. Bone and skin. The reverse of the canvas becomes a mirror not of form so much as condition, of materiality in the face of time.

Imagine Francis Bacon in front of a mirror. Here is a description of him preparing his face to go out.

*"he applied the basic foundation with lightning dexterity born of long practice. He was more careful, even sparing with the rouge. For his hair he had a selection of kiwi boot polishes in various browns. He blended them on the back of his hand, selecting a tone appropriate for the particular*

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<sup>66</sup> Pg 57 Sylvester, David. *The Brutality of FACT*. Thames & Hudson, London, 1987.

*evening, and brushed them through his abundant hair with a shoe brush. He polished his teeth with Vim”<sup>67</sup>*

And then later another description

*“Francis used to let his stubble grow for three or four days and then rehearse the brushstrokes on his face, in front of the mirror... those strange revolving brushstrokes, that are so familiar from his pictures would be rehearsed with max factor pancake makeup. He had a series of these max factor pots he would take one and do a sort of smear across his face.”<sup>68</sup>*

The reversed canvas, three layers. The bottom layer a coating of the white ground, Bacon always used pre-primed canvas. Here is the skull, a brittle white bone. Then the porous vulnerable web of linen, over its surface a slight fuzz of hair. The colour and feel and the softness of skin. On top of this the hand moves layers of paint attempting to find a shape. At a certain point the paint is left alone, allowed to harden and set into a trace of these earlier movements. There is no halt, only a shift in the site of motion. As the oil leaches from the paint it gradually rots the linen beneath. Rather than flesh the paint is a thin emulsion of contact between the whole presence, the amalgamation of mind and body of the artist, and the pressure of the external world. The flesh-linen disappears recreating the space between the motion-mark of paint and the ground that connected it to the wider world. The painting as object is now present as an echo, supported by its dissolution into the space around it.

A correlation between painting canvas and the concealments of make up was made by Lomazzo who dedicated a chapter to the practice of face painting.<sup>69</sup> He condemns this as dishonest, concealing true nature and comparable to lying. He contrasts this with the ‘nobility’ of painting on inert supports, which is an honest action.

Bacon’s actions conflate these two positions. As he regards his face in the mirror himself how can any deception be practised, where can anything be hidden?

Here is ‘the trap’; feeling your own face with your own hand but not knowing where in this loop you recognise yourself, possess yourself? Rather than sensing complete possession, the observer views his or her own face as the work of a stranger.

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<sup>67</sup> Pg 40 Farson, Daniel. *The Gilded Gutter Life*. Vintage, London, 1994.

<sup>68</sup> Pg 85 *ibid*.

<sup>69</sup> Lomazzo, Giovanni. *A Tracte Containing The Artes Of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge & Buildinge*. Englished By R(Ichard) H(Aydocke), J. Barnes, Oxford, 1598. (Italian 1585).

*The Times and Spaces of Painting Considered  
as two Simultaneous Surfaces.*

In regarding a painting, the viewer is obliged to construct two contradictory surfaces. The first of these is the ever-present web of perceptual information. Sight, sound, taste, touch and smell are together fashioned into an apparently seamless space/time continuity in consciousness. Each sense is present in varying degrees.

Sight is an obvious necessity, and is not passive but constantly adjusting to shifting light, shadow and reflection, momentary occlusions. From this period of observation a unified uninterrupted 'image' of the work is constructed within the memory.

The painting persists in silence, the viewer filtering sound away from it. It is not essential to the remembered experience of viewing, that the bustle of a crowd, or traffic, or the comments of companions be recalled. These do not become entangled with the work itself. The viewer remembers only isolated vision, abstracted, their own bodily presence, fatigue, hunger, placed in a different zone, a place accessed as anecdote and somehow secondary to the primal encounter with the surface. The thought of the surface then becomes a memory of a separated space, an ectopia.

In constructing this space, the flow of perception is shaped into a sense of a singular artefact, complete within its own parameters, self illuminated. This process of filtering and filling may be compared to the 'restoration' work of the conservator. The layers of varnish, the careful 'retouching' are all directed by the desire to preserve, to conserve the 'original' state of the painting. This original moment is a fictional construct, a projection of exactness that dissolves on closer inspection. Where is the moment of the paintings' completion? The last brushstroke, or when it has dried? The moment the artist decides to no longer touch the work, or when it is first displayed? That this moment can be known and that it must be preserved and protected, is the *raison d'être* for the conservator, and informs the work of the curator, the critic and the artist. This knowledge constantly recurs alongside the experience of the object of the painting in the passage of time. In looking at the actual object of the canvas of Velasquez's painting *Las Meninas*<sup>70</sup> perhaps the first thing to strike you is that it is constructed from three pieces of canvas sewn together. However this is rarely if ever

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<sup>70</sup> *The Family Of Philip IV, Or The Maids Of Honour ("Las Meninas")* Diego Velazquez De Silva (1599-1660)  
Canvas (318 X 276), Prado, Madrid.

mentioned in accounts of it.<sup>71</sup> This does not indicate a lack of perspicuity on the part of those who have examined this painting, rather a shared assumption about where the painting begins. The painting is formed from the skin of its surface, the continuous disconnected dimension that sits above the support. The presence of the join in the canvas, visible to the viewer and visible to the artist, becomes invisible in the conception, the memory painting.<sup>72</sup>

The painting comes into being as an event, a process of amalgamation of ideas of the general and particular, which produces a collective idea of an individual work. That something, which is at any one point unformed and imprecise can be fashioned into this unity brings to mind the power of a visual illusion, which continues to function no matter how clearly its' workings may be rationalised. Such illusions reveal, through negation, the processes of understanding the world through perception.

This surface completely surrounds and contains the observer.

The second space the viewer must be aware of is that presented on the surface of the canvas. For the picture plane to exist the viewer must assign certain qualities to it. The space of the painting is not continuous with the world around it. It is isolated by the edge of the support, and the ground upon which it is executed. This border is absolute, a state of impenetrability that is only possible because it is a mental construction. As such, this plane could be described as having no depth, existing between the viewer's gaze and the structure of the support.

It is impossible to enter the space of the painting. Time and space are fixed. The viewer has only one viewpoint. The picture plane is static against the moving world around it, against which it is tight pressed.

The viewer simultaneously creates both spaces and thereby allows two possible universes coexistence. However this act of potency is tempered, as it is coupled with a loss of control. It is perhaps more akin to an automatic mechanism of perception/conception than it is to a conscious act of creation. This break is not an anomaly that can be dispelled by rationality, but it intimates multiplicity, which cannot be apprehended or brought to an easy co-existence. This uneasy space is apparent in the consideration of Ellsworth Kelly's juxtaposition of mono-colour canvases in direct proximity to each other. They are parallel but do not join. Although there is some sense of a core of vision, a sight that may have generated these

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<sup>71</sup> For an extensive account of the many and various approaches to this work see Stratton-Pruitt, S. L (ed). *Velazquez's Las Meninas*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

<sup>72</sup> The printed reproduction of the image serves to reinforce this disappearance.

arrangements, there is no dénouement, no revelation. The surfaces neither attract nor repel each other. Rather they remain fixed. As the viewer also enters this relationship, the initial frantic movement of thought calms into a steady regard.

The relationship might be described as the presence of a fundamental schism, a constant tearing away. The paintings surface is a signal of an immanent irreconcilability of event and reflection, knowledge and knowing, gradually increasing distance within each mind.

Alternatively it might be seen as a grinding together of two planes, a movement from which a newly malleable admixture of material might emerge. The viewer occupies the space of co-existence unable to enter either space fully.

Yet there is co-existence, and the idea of the surface persists. Shards of fractured perception, events held simultaneously in the non-causal amalgam of past, present and future that allows movement. The surface of a fountain?

### *The Surface of a Fountain*

*‘What else can you call painting but a similar embracing  
with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in  
the fountain?’<sup>73</sup>*

Is Alberti simply asking for painting to possess the reflectivity of the surface of water? If so he has picked a strange metaphor. The water of a fountain is not a smooth surface. It is in constant motion. The constant fall of drops interrupt the reflection of the sky. The body of water is pulled apart and reunited by the unending circularity of the apparatus. The water mixes with the air and reflects shards of light. So what is presented on ‘*the surface of the water in the fountain*’? A fractured image of everything around it and an image of itself. A circle of separation, reflection and reunion.

Perhaps this is a willful misunderstanding. A romanticism.

What else can it be called?

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<sup>73</sup> Pg 65 Bk II Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*, Penguin, London., 1991. (Latin 1435).

The surface becomes this shattering. The constant interruptions seen together form a predictable pattern, a rhythm, which must be brought to a jarring halt if they are to be apprehended.

### *The Surface as Collision*

What else can you call painting except a similar embrace with art of what is presented a car's windscreen on the motorway in the heavy rain? Between the sweeps of the wipers the screen fills with drops of water, each a prism, a tiny lens, swelling, the light from outside softening, slowing becoming crystalline, seemingly on the brink of some transcendent offering, suddenly swept away. The wipers reveal the world of hazard and that to embrace transcendence is to embrace collision.

What is this collision? It is the experience of the constant re-emergence of the mundane. The suspicion that the ascent to 'higher realms' resembles the trajectory of a stone thrown into the air.

The collision of matter and time.

The collision of sight and object.

The collision of each dimension, second into third, third into fourth and beyond.

The collision of paint and canvas.

The collision of ink and paper.

A contact and an exploration. The constant re-emergence of complexity.

### *A Particle Surface*

The particle thick membrane of the surface is the site of this exploration. Marginal, almost meaningless, but even so the place of increase, of change.<sup>74</sup>

The investigation of the painting is also the investigation of the space in front of it, the viewers' own trajectory of approach and retreat. This seems to be a movement around, across, and behind the surface, even a desperate piercing of it, an attempt at penetration and

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<sup>74</sup> In Beckett's *Three Dialogues* 'B' is chided by 'D' 'Are we really to deplore the painting that is a rallying among the things of time that pass and hurry us away towards a time that endures and gives increase' (*B exits weeping*). Pg141 Beckett also talks of 'a gain in nature' in his introductory remarks. Pg138 Beckett, Samuel. *Disjecta*, John Calder, London. 1983.

immersion. Alternatively it is an attempt to break away from total containment, to struggle free.

This alternative space is the space that contains a complete perspective of everything, everytime. This is the promise of transcendence the point beyond which the present and past must be lost. A sideways step into the space of utopia.

Movement becomes impossible; there is no other place to go to. What then can be the human reaction to such a condition? Only the moment of recognition, which unfolds into revelation.

Can painting provide some intimation of this space? Can the definitive absence, the emptiness of Gisbrecht's reversed canvas, be matched with an attempt to frame a description of this simultaneous plane?

An image of this is the anonymously painted '*Portrait of Sir Henry Unton*'.<sup>75</sup>

### *Full of Everything*

The surface of this work is completely full. It is not organised by the perspective of space but by the space/time of an entire life. The scale and arrangement of elements within the painting are dependent on this, not on the need to replicate a frozen moment of a single correct perspective. This is not a naive painting, although it appears curious when compared a single perspective of space, the simpler organisation we have become more accustomed to.<sup>76</sup> In its composition it can be linked to the tradition of the *Tabula Cebetis*,<sup>77</sup> although it differs in that it concerns a specific life rather than the presentation of an 'everyman's' progress. The painting becomes not only a commemoration of an individual, but also a meditation upon omniscience and even a model of predestination.

The painting is divided into two sections, organised around the large figure of Sir Henry Unton. To the right is the mundane world, the house. This section is governed by Death. To the left are the spiritual world, the church, the preached word, the tomb, and the angel of

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<sup>75</sup> *Sir Henry Unton* by Unknown artist. Oil on panel, circa 1596, 74cm x 163cm National Portrait Gallery, London.

<sup>76</sup> Others have described it as such; David Evett argues '*although individual scenes may be spatially coherent (within the limitations of the painters rather modest skills) the painting as a whole is not.*' Pg156. Evett, David. *Some Elizabethan Allegorical Paintings: A Preliminary Enquiry*. Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol 52. 1989

<sup>77</sup> The *Tabula Cebetis* was a classical dialogue which presented an allegorical journey of the human through life. It provided a model for Bunyan's *Pilgrims progress*. Later it was appropriated and modified by Hogarth for his '*Progresses*'. For an account of the influence of this form see Schleiber, Reinhart. *Tabula Cebetis*, Gebr. Mann Verlag, Berlin. 1973.

judgement. The deeds of a life are remembered as an example in this world, and as evidence in the next. Rather than a representation of a dead man, in this painting Sir Henry is literally in the middle of his own life, extending out to occupy all points of past and future. He appears caught at a moment of pause, as if aware of his precarious position. Before him is a blank page and he holds a quill about to make a mark. He glances up, looking out of the painting, meeting the viewer's gaze, momentarily disturbed, and suddenly made aware of the existence of the universe beyond the bounds of his own life. He meets the gaze of judgement.

There is an instruction in this arrangement. Only through such awareness can any structure be given to the swirling movements of the world, which are bracketed by the two rooms, which stage birth and death. Time acquires direction through this soteriology. The particular events of an individual's life are revealed as if in predestined pattern. They have happened, and to one who can view the painting as a whole they are constantly happening.

Smaller figures of Sir Henry show him at different significant stages and events. It is a work of multiple narratives. In the painting episodes are arranged against each other within the context of other structures.<sup>78</sup> The painting does not show a chain of events, each linked by causation, but a series of episodes. It shows how different parts of life and death may be brought into balance, and through this how life might be seen as meaningful. The balance suggested within this work confronts the viewer with the difficulty of understanding his or her own relationship with the divine. As an object it presents us with the two 'times', which St Augustine described in the *'City of God'*. A teleological finite time of man contained within the simultaneous omnipresent infinity of divine time.<sup>79</sup>

The work offers the viewer a godlike view of everything and every time. This is undermined, as the painting cannot be absorbed in a single glance. Its fullness becomes an intimation of an individual's finitude, how can anyone gain such perspective?

Can this work of fullness sit alongside the emptiness of Gisbrecht? Between these two paintings exists a particle slim surface, the thickness of one grain of pigment, born of the constantly reoccurring gap between the full and empty. How might this place be explored? Each possible extension also contains the likelihood of its own collapse. The movement of

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<sup>78</sup> The frantic activity of life is balanced against the remembrance of the tomb. Public life and private life progress separately but alongside each other. To the left the scene is dominated by the church service, to the right the circular procession of the masque. The internal clockwise circle of the masque led by Mercury the god of change, sits within the greater counter clockwise circle of public life.

<sup>79</sup> Augustine of Hippo (trans Betterson H), *The City of God*, Penguin, London. 1972 (First written in Latin early fifth century).



thought between these poles pushes thought back and forth, colliding with the surface of the painting. This is the space of breathing, the space of memory and perception, the spasm of expansion and contraction within the heart. The picture plane becomes a chamber that completely contains the viewer. Rather than the illusion of interconnecting planes presented on the flat surface of the Cabinet Painting might it not be possible to imagine an entire structure, a chamber, built from picture planes completely containing and immersing the viewer, each wall constantly turning away from the blade that seeks to penetrate it? <sup>80</sup>

The painted chamber created at Hawstead by Lady Anne Drury might well be described as an attempt to create such an artefact.

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<sup>80</sup> This recalls the jade burial suits of Han dynasty China which completely encased the body in square plates of jade in an attempt to contain and reflect the 'chi' life force within the recently deceased aristocrat.

# IV

## THE CHAMBER

*Surrounded by the surface.*

*The Hawstead Chamber. The Glittering House. How to look at emblem books. A close look at the panels. There is no rest here.*

The Hawstead chamber is an intriguing space. Largely overlooked save as a curio, it is in fact a highly sophisticated intertwining of layers of knowledge into an artefact designed to generate and focus thought through practice.<sup>81</sup>

The viewer enters a seven-foot square closet, the walls of which are completely covered with painted panels. The room is dimly illuminated by light, which falls through the slit like windows. There is a seat in the centre of the chamber, upon which the viewer may sit in order to comfortably read the book placed there. The arrangement invites meditation. Before reading the book the viewer already begins to discern the possibilities of the space. Arms stretched wide can almost touch each wall. This small room is decorated with images and motto's in combinations that border paradox, yet invite connection.

Eyes scan, grooming the surface, eager for even a flea's worth of movement amongst the fixed; something to stir up the fast congealing thought clots. In a small square room a person accustomed to walking might begin to pace. Through constantly turning away from the enclosing walls they might grind a circle upon the floor. The circle is filled with the sense of being, having been, will be, layered over each other a flattened spiral. The viewer is surrounded, immersed in a static world; a trap for perception, and a trap for conception. The spring is your own momentum, a spiral grown into a hoop. A daily practice, a daily trap.

If a repeating pattern of thought were connected to one of movement, these actions would create a physical trace. The earth might be ground beneath this movement and begin to hold the shape, and thereby guide and focus further movement, offering an easier passage. Within the brain a pathway of synapses might also become shaped, habituated to flash in a certain sequence, to pass a message a certain way. The operation becomes habitual; the pattern now established can be repeated without special attention, or even happen with no consciousness at all. This generates a kind of timelessness, as the next step is pre-ordained, pre-determined.

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<sup>81</sup> The difficulty in comparing the chamber to any existing artefact has perhaps been a large part of the reason for its characterisation as a 'curiosity', resistant to a complete inclusion in any particular account of thought or culture. The two major accounts of the panelled room are those of Sir John Cullum, and of N.K Farmer. Cullum approaches them as a gentleman antiquarian exploring the quaint and curious as one of the facets of an exhaustive study of the local area. Farmer describes the panels in some detail in his examination of the visual in Elizabethan verse. In this account the panels are seen as an extension of the vogue for emblem books. The panels are also referred to in less detail as related to the development of Joseph Halls theories of meditation, and of the role of women in 16<sup>th</sup> century religion.

Again the emphasis is of the panels working in the same fashion as an emblem book. See Farmer, Norman. *Poets and the Visual Arts in Renaissance England*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1984. Mantz et al in Westerweel, Bert (ed). *Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Field of the Emblems*, Brill, Leiden, 1997.

A loop of movement defined by its own structure, and so separate. A mind can be formed from a myriad of such loops, some microscopic, some of vast diameter. Sometimes these loops intersect, blurring into areas of intensity, at others they spin distant and alienated.

To reflect upon this is to attempt to shape points of halt, points of apprehension. The idea of a space made granular, monadic, and ripe for perspective and measurement. A communication of such apprehension allows for the escape from the infinite regress of reflection; points of finitude emerge through the distortion of friction. Such points, even in their limitation indicate the possibility of control, of understanding, the possibility of accumulation and persistence. The movement between such halts grinds out pathways.

Objects accumulate different layers of meaning; they are linked by a narrative trajectory and symbolic power. The journey is a device for alteration. A web of connections is woven from these ectoplastic artefacts, gradually usurping the mundane, seeming to reform the now that we inhabit. And in this the promise of rest becomes dependent on fevered movement, as rest is always elsewhere.

*The Glittering House at Hawstead.*

The house sits a hollow square. Many of the windows on the outside are high set and slit like, a hangover from the military past. This use has been superseded and transformed by another thin surface. The outside walls are covered with a white render,

*'thickly stuck with fragments of glass, which made a brilliant appearance when the sun shone, and even by moonlight..'*<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Pg 156 Cullum, Rev. Sir John, *The History and Antiquities of Hawsted in the County of Suffolk* J.Nichols, London, 1790. Demolished in the 1800s Hawstead House survives only within some sketches and the Rev Sir John Cullum's book. *The History and Antiquities of Hawsted in the County of Suffolk*. This work follows the form of a classic Eighteenth century gentleman antiquarian's study. A combination of local history, focussing on genealogy and curiosity, agronomy and science. The work is interwoven with personal anecdotes and recollection of tradition. Cullum remembered Hawstead house from his childhood as his family home. Now it exists as a series of imagistic remarks upon which 'descants' can be worked, a fragmented illumination.

Enter through the front gates, past two imposing gateposts and take the first step onto the path.<sup>83</sup> This path not only guides the visitor, but also displays information about the status, tastes and aspirations of the owners of the property.<sup>84</sup>

The building is formed from two quadrangles sitting next to each other.<sup>85</sup> The first square full of work sheds, stores and stables, is the centre of the agricultural activities that form the basis of the family's income. The second is the family home, raised on a mound, twelve foot high and surrounded by a moat, the banks of which were lined with brick.

The visitor moves into the 'inner court' of the second square,

*'The approach to the house was by a flight of steps, and a strong brick bridge of three arches through a small jealous wicket, formed in the great well-timbered gate, that rarely grated on its hinges. Immediately upon you peeping through the wicket, the first object that unavoidably struck you, was a stone figure of Hercules, as it was called, holding in one hand a club across his shoulders, the other resting on one hip, discharging a perennial stream of water by the urinary passage into a stone basin'*<sup>86</sup>

This imposing and insouciant figure of the legendary strongman was flanked by two greyhounds, the crest of the Drury family.<sup>87</sup> The walls of the inner court were covered with a

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<sup>83</sup> Robert Drury had these moved to Hardwick house. In a photograph taken in the 1920's their scale can be appreciated. Spanton Jarman collection BRO\_K505\_0154.jpg

<sup>84</sup> 'Elizabethan structures organised the flow of traffic so that physical movement enacted the disclosure of meaning in gradual sequence. The process of communication depended on a system of spatial organisation' Pg 163 Hazard, Mary E. *Elizabethan Silent Language*, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 2000. The Chapter concerning *Place, Boundary and Position* (Pg155-207) tackles at length the importance of concepts of ordered movement, procession and ceremony in Elizabethan and Jacobean life.

<sup>85</sup> The form of the double square echoes the shape of the Roman villa, and with its moat was still a defensible fortified position. The form of the double cube was promoted by Inigo Jones amongst others as the ideal form for a building.

<sup>86</sup> Pg 156 Cullum, Rev. Sir John, *The History and Antiquities of Hawsted in the County of Suffolk*, J.Nichols, London, 1790. This figure is depicted in the 1813 edition. (op Pg 156). He has many of the features associated with the popular figure of the Green or Wild man.

<sup>87</sup> The statue is dated 1578, the year in which Queen Elizabeth visited the house whilst on one of her famous progresses, an event which was the occasion for much decoration and improvement of the Hall. It is reported she dropped her fan into the moat. Pg118-128 vol II Nichols, John. *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, J.Nichols & Sons, London 1823.

fine growth of *Pyracantha*, whose dense green leaves, white flowers and red berries provided a 'fine display'.<sup>88</sup>

Inside the house the main staircase was decorated with painted boards portraying various domestic servants.<sup>89</sup> On the first floor were a series of bedchambers, the large 'royal' apartment and private rooms, including a 'still' room and the painted closet. The 'still' was a distillery, a workroom<sup>90</sup> for creating medicines and flavourings from plants and other substances, (such practice was traditionally a site of female knowledge). This room was decorated with a large death's head. There is no further information about the 'still' room but it is possible to speculate that its location near the painted chamber may be significant. It indicates that the two spaces represent aspects of the same project, physical and mental exploration and show a further intersection of the practices of natural science and spiritual revelation. Such an arrangement would conform to the descriptions of ideal disposition of space for philosophical 'work'.<sup>91</sup> The detailed and specific paintings of plants, which line the bottom of the painted chamber, reinforce this impression of a deep knowledge and interest in the practical uses as well as symbolism of plants.

That the walls were painted is not in itself unusual. Other examples of painted ceilings and walls survive.<sup>92</sup> What is unique about the Hawstead chamber is the intertwining of the content of the panels and the unusual arrangement within this small chamber. Sets of decorated panels would normally be a feature of large public spaces, a combination of heraldic devices,

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<sup>88</sup> This was one of several rare plants growing at Hawstead. The Bacon family were known for their interest in collecting and cultivation see Hearn, Karen. *Nathaniel Bacon. Artist, Gentleman and Gardener*. Tate Publishing, London, 2005.

<sup>89</sup> The age of these is uncertain. However it is interesting to note that Nathaniel Bacon also had paintings of housemaids hanging over his main stair. Hearn, Karen. *Nathaniel Bacon. Artist, Gentleman and Gardener*. Tate Publishing, London, 2005. Cullum also describes a series of public spaces on the ground floor, 'a smoaking (smoking) room', a dining hall, a walled garden, a cloistered balcony, the family chapel where Cullum notes that the last holy office performed was his own Christening. Pg 156 Cullum, Rev. Sir John, *The History and Antiquities of Hawsted in the County of Suffolk*, J.Nichols, London, 1790

<sup>90</sup> The term 'laboratory' has this sense of workroom as its foundation, growing from the Latin 'labor', to work. 'The Work' was the name given to the chemical explorations of Alchemists. Hence a laboratory was 'a place of (the) Work'.

<sup>91</sup> The arrangement of spaces for contemplation prayer, and physical research was a key component of alchemical endeavour.

<sup>92</sup> For example the parable room at Kenneil Castle, Bo'ness, the Murals at Hill Hall, or the Summer Room at University College Oxford. However all of these function more decoratively. None display the degree of composition or inter-relation present at Hawstead. An account in 'The Gentleman's Magazine' describe an intriguing panelled 'bed-stead' in Hinckley Leicestershire, but there is no visual record. The mottos described are based directly on biblical quotations and direct moral directives, without the subtleties of doubt so present at Hawstead. For further descriptions of murals and painted rooms of the period see Croft Murray, E *Decorative Painting in England Vol I 1537-1837*, Country Life, London 1962. Pg 279 Plates 251-67 Hill, Oliver. *Scottish Castles of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, Country Life: London, 1953 and Gent, Lucy. *Albion's Classicism.. The Visual Arts in Britain 1550-1600*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995.

decorative patterns and religious stories. Alongside this more temporary inscriptions might be found. This decoration was a public act, both a decorative diversion and a statement of the character of the householders, their family links, their religion and politics, and their education.

The interior spaces of large Elizabethan houses functioned as frames for fluid exchanges of ideas and positions.<sup>93</sup> Edward Rainbowe described the home of Anne Clifford, a contemporary of Lady Anne Drury, as being covered with texts.

*'She would frequently bring out of the rich storehouse of her memory things new and old. Sentences or sayings of remark which she had or learnt out of authors, and with these her walls, her bed, her hangings and Furniture must be adorned: causing her servants to write them in papers... that she, or they in time of their dressing or as occasion served might remember and make their descants upon them.'*<sup>94</sup>

An active practice of contemplation is wound around the routine of daily activities. These 'descants' were practised parallel to activity of the everyday world; each item perceived also has an alternative context, a moral or a story.

Within the Bacon family there appears to have been a strong tradition of investigation into the arrangement of spaces as vehicles of thought. Sir Nicholas Bacon's (Anne Drury's grandfather) great hall at Gorehambury was decorated with 'sententiae', aphoristic philosophical statements drawing from the Stoic tradition.<sup>95</sup> The name 'Stoic' is in fact derived from the *Stoa Poikile*, a long gallery in ancient Athens, covered with paintings by Polygnolus (known as the ethics painter). The philosopher Zeno taught in this space, using the paintings to focus his words.

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<sup>93</sup> In her account of graffiti in early modern England Juliet Fleming proposes that writing and drawing on walls did not possess the sense of trespass that it has since acquired. Rather it was an expected and enjoyed activity, an act of conversation and remembrance Fleming, Juliet. *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, Reaktion, London, 2001.

She describes the intellectual economy of Early Modern England as 'collective, aphrostatic, inscripted rather than individualistic, lyric and voice centred' (Pg 41)

<sup>94</sup> Edward Rainbowe- A sermon preached on the internment of Anne Countess of Pembroke (Anne Clifford). Appendix E in Clifford, Anne, A.C.O, Acheson (ed). *The Memoir of 1603 and The Diary of 1616-1619*. Broadview Press, Peterborough, 2006.

<sup>95</sup> McCutcheon, Elizabeth, *Sir Nicholas Bacon's Great House Sententiae*, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1977. The decoration consisted of ornamental texts without imagery. They were largely derived from the writings of Seneca. McCutcheon describes how each sentence "draws its pervasive force from paradox and antithesis rather than continued metaphor." (Pg22). These sentences were copied along with their ornamentation into manuscript book form.

Francis Bacon (Anne Drury's Uncle) inherited Gorehambury and further developed the paintings. John Aubrey describes Francis Bacon's hall as being decorated '*every pane with severall figures of beest, bird or flower*'.<sup>96</sup> It may be reasonably conjectured that Anne Bacon continued this tradition, and perhaps created its most sophisticated and sole surviving exemplar.<sup>97</sup> The Hawstead chamber combined the compositional power of the kind of decoration fashioned for public display with an intensely personal private array of associative knowledge.

### *The Painted Chamber*

*'Contiguous to one of the bedchambers was a wainscoted closet, about 7 feet square, the panels painted with various sentences, emblems, and mottos. It was called the painted closet, at first probably designed for an oratory, and from one of the sentences, for the use of a lady. The dresses of the figures are of the age of James I. This closet was therefore fitted up for the last lady Drury, and perhaps under her direction. The paintings are well executed; and now put up in a small apartment at Hardwick House.'*<sup>98</sup>

This passage is the sole known description of the 'painted closet' in the original configuration. By the time of this account the object had already been moved once, into a 'small apartment'. This would have occurred under the auspices of the Drurys as part of their move from Hawstead Hall to Hardwick House in 1612.<sup>99</sup> Later photographic evidence shows that the panels were moved again within Hardwick House and extended along the wall of a

<sup>96</sup> Pg 17 Aubrey, John (1626-1697). *Brief Lives*, Penguin, London, 2000.

<sup>97</sup> That Anne Drury might have been particularly interested in creating and using such spaces is an intriguing possibility. At Hardwick House another 'extra-parochial' space was licensed by the Bishop, and in 1616 on the death of her husband Robert, Lady Drury created a chapel in '*an absolute cellar; and which puts one in mind of those caverns in which the primitive Christians are said to have sometimes performed their religious services, for the sake of privacy*'. That the licences for two such spaces were granted by Bishop Thomas Ridley, which Cullum notes as something 'truly remarkable' Given the political implications of religious thought at the time such licenses were essential to avoid accusations of dissidence. Cullum Pg 236-7

<sup>98</sup> Cullum, Rev. Sir John, *The History and Antiquities of Hawsted in the county of Suffolk*, J.Nichols, London, 1790. (1813 illustrated edition). Cullum's family acquired Hawstead and Hardwick Hall after the Drurys, who had no heirs. His account can be considered to be based on a depth of local knowledge.

<sup>99</sup> The village of Hawstead near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. The name of the village is spelled variously throughout the sources quoted (Halsted, Hawsted etc). For the sake of clarity Hawstead will be used throughout.



corridor.<sup>100</sup> On the demolition of this house the panels were moved to their present location, Christchurch Mansion Museum in Ipswich. Here they are installed around three walls, regaining something of their original ‘closet’ arrangement.

By comparing the dates of the various sources used in the creation of the panels with the movements of people at Hawstead, it is probable that they were created around 1604-5.<sup>101</sup> As Cullum notes, one of the inscriptions indicates that the space was for the use of a woman, “*Numquam Minus Sola, Quam Cum Sola*”

(Never less a lonely woman, than when a woman alone).<sup>102</sup>

At present forty-two individual panels remain, of which thirty-eight bear a combination of image and text, the remaining four show empty landscapes. Seven other panels sit above these, each with a sentence painted within a decorative border. The approximate dimensions, which Cullum gives, can be matched to the panels indicating that the site has largely retained most of its original elements intact.<sup>103</sup> It is possible to discern something of the original disposition of the panels by examining the structure framing them and the congruence of size between individual panels, and the mottos, which surmounted them.

From this examination it is possible to divide the chamber into several smaller sets. Thematic examination of the content of the panels themselves indicates sets of doublets and triplets. Much of this is retained within the present arrangement. Apparent thematic anomalies might then be the result of the accidental exchange of panels of the same size. The position of the mottoes above the panels is subject to the same conditions. Any reconstruction of the original ‘painted closet’ must therefore be an extended speculation.

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<sup>100</sup> A set of photographs of Hardwick House taken in the 1930s are preserved in the Spanton Jarman collection held at the Bury St Edmunds records office. They may also be accessed at the website [http://www.burypastandpresent.org.uk/j\\_cross.html](http://www.burypastandpresent.org.uk/j_cross.html)

<sup>101</sup> This approximation may be reached through the evidence of improvements carried out at the house, the movements of the family and convergences with Joseph Halls writings.

<sup>102</sup> The panels discretely contains within its imagery heraldic badges that clearly link them to the Bacon/Drury families, giving further support to Cullum’s assertion that the chamber was the creation of Lady Anne Drury. A boar very similar to crest of the Bacon’s appears in ‘Odi Prophanum Vulgus’, a greyhound, crest of the Drury’s in ‘Non fugitiva fides’. These closely resemble the animal figures on the Drury tomb in Hawstead church.

<sup>103</sup> The peripatetic history of the chamber demands that observations about the panels interrelationship be treated with caution. The Hardwick photograph, which dates from the early Twentieth century, shows the panels arranged in the same order as they now appear at Christchurch Mansion( ‘*Hardwick House, passage with painted wooden panels*’ BRO\_K505\_0477 The Spanton Jarman Collection., Bury St Edmunds). Given that the panels were being moved to a museum it is not surprising that a degree of curatorial care was exercised. However the illustration (added to 1813 edition) that accompanies Cullum’s account shows the panels in a different order and reduced to a uniform scale. For much of their history the panels have been considered as a decorative curiosity, and this could have easily resulted in an alteration of their original relationships. The panels are painted on individual sheets of wood, which are then held within a larger framework. This would allow for the misplacement or deliberate rearrangement of their individual positions during any movement.

The structure can be regarded as a memory theatre. The careful organisation of classical memory systems was based around a spatial ordering which can be discerned within this structure. The mental images constructed by this practice were not simply metaphorical or representational. They were considered to act as manifestations of a hieroglyphic power, a belief rooted in the Platonic tradition. The mixture of word and image is a complete fusion, an absolute concept that clarifies reality. This concept of 'understanding' also allowed for a physical construction of complex patterns of thought, an opportunity for an individual to become entirely immersed and to shape and refine the chaos of the mind.

Alongside the practice of memory other philosophies are arrayed. There is a strong influence of Stoicism, and of Christian thought, references to esoteric symbols and to erotic classical poetry.<sup>104</sup> That these elements can coexist is typical of the educated outlook of the time. The interrelation of such elements became something of a religious duty, a practice of uncovering links between the apparently irreconcilable. At its most extreme this desire for interpretation becomes a mania for layers of significance, '*What do they mean by a finger? A finger means a man's stomach*'.<sup>105</sup>

Through a close examination of the remains of the site itself, and the milieu of those associated with it, the painted chamber emerges as a point of intersection, a convergence of developing traditions. It becomes a functional device, which generates and focuses the practice of contemplation. The placement of the chamber directly adjacent to a bedchamber suggests that this process is part of a daily routine, a daily practice.

That the seven foot square of the chamber is a site of activity, is made clear by one of the sentences above the panels,

*'Parva sed apta mihi: Nec tamen hic requies',*  
(*Small but fitting for me; yet there is no rest here*).

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<sup>104</sup> Classical Philosophical texts were often fragmentary and adapted to suit different purposes, (particularly to match the dogma of the church). It should not be assumed classical texts would be read in the same context as they are now found. The tendency was rather to construct unity amongst dissenting authors and to present an idealised 'Golden Age' of thought, ignoring discrepancies. For an overview of the changing intellectual climate see Reiss, Timothy, J. *Knowledge, Discovery and Imagination in the Early Modern Europe 'The Rise of Aesthetic rationalism'*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

<sup>105</sup> Pg74 Horapollo, Nilous (*Trans by George Boas*). *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978. Of dubious provenance this work was supposedly written by a Egyptian priest explaining Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs. First published in 1505 it was received with great interest by scholars throughout Europe. Later additions were constantly augmented with newly 'discovered' material. Certain images within this work have strong resonance with those in the chamber, for example the ass-eared man, and the soul-hawk.

The individual who enters the chamber will become completely immersed within its space, totally surrounded by its imagery. This constant movement forms a circle within the square chamber. The assertion that there can be ‘no rest’ encapsulates the character of the chamber. The panels contain images and mottos, which demand the viewer undertakes a series of mental gymnastics as their assumptions are constantly upended.

The painted chamber functions by the interweaving of different sets of juxtapositions; placing different sets of knowledge (natural history, classical poetry, Biblical story, emblematic traditions, family history) in relation to each other, and thereby asking the occupant of the space to shape a mental path through the resulting complexity.

Several influences seem to bear on the composition of the panels, each of which might be traced to the individual characteristics of those close to their construction. Lady Anne Drury’s relationship to the tradition of scholarship within the Bacon family (she was born Anne Bacon) and easy familiarity with current science was complemented by her relationship with her brother Nathaniel Bacon, a painter who concerned himself with the most advanced contemporary artistic practice.<sup>106</sup> Anne Drury sought out and appointed Joseph Hall as her family pastor. The post had previously been occupied by George Estey another Cambridge scholar, who dedicated a book of his writings to Anne Drury.<sup>107</sup> This was an example that Hall would follow<sup>108</sup>. As a student at Cambridge Joseph Hall had already become known for his writing, pioneering the revival of the classical form of satire. His works were considered licentious enough for the Archbishop of Canterbury to order them to be burnt in 1599.<sup>109</sup> That Lady Drury should carefully select such individuals indicates an interest in people of a high level of education and with advanced reformist tendencies in religion (for which Cambridge was renowned).

During his time at Hawstead Joseph Hall embarked on a series of works concerning meditation focussing on the link between the actions of looking and of thought.<sup>110</sup> He later

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<sup>106</sup> For an account of his life and work see- Hearn, Karen. *Nathaniel Bacon. Artist, Gentleman and Gardener*. Tate Publishing, London, 2005.

<sup>107</sup> Estey Rev George ‘Certain Godly and Learned Dispositions Upon Diverse Parts of Scripture’ Richard Bankworth, London 1603.

<sup>108</sup> This is perhaps significant in indicating the degree of influence Anne Drury had on both men. Hall’s dedication is particularly interesting departing from the normal formula for such writing.

<sup>109</sup> For a general overview of Hall’s works see Huntley, Frank Livingstone. *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation in Seventeenth Century England*, MRTS, New York, 1981.

<sup>110</sup> First published as *Meditations and vows divine and moral* (divided into two books), Humfrey Lownes for John Porter, London, 1606. *The Arte of Divine Meditation*, London, 1607. And continuously produced over the next twenty seven years all these meditations were collected together in one volume in 1633. Hall, Joseph. *Occasional Meditations*, Nathaniel Butler, London, 1633.

described these works as '*Occasional Meditations*', each one a chain of thought growing from the occurrence, the occasion, of a certain sight or sound from the everyday world.<sup>111</sup>

The chamber suggests a style of meditation that differs radically from the tradition of Christian meditation, which during the reformation had become particularly associated with the Jesuit Order. Here an individual would focus on an iconic image of Christ to seek a transcendent experience of union.<sup>112</sup> The Hawstead chamber is determinedly non-transcendent, perception is always questioned and images remain only images. A barbed comparison made in Hall's utopian satire *Mundus Alter et Idem* makes it clear that Jesuit meditation was known at Hawstead. He describes a prison in the land populated by gluttons, situated far from the city so the prisoners will not even smell food.

*'The walls of it are all painted about with all manner of  
good victuals, only to excite the prisoners appetite unto his  
greater plague, and verily one Jesuit or other hath seen  
these walls and there upon devised pictures for their  
Chambers of Meditation'.*<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Hall spent several years at Hawstead and although he had a very good relationship with Anne Drury his tenure was not entirely happy. He seems to have found little favour with Sir Robert Drury, Anne Drury's husband, a soldier and diplomat and his friend William Lyly, who Hall describes as '*a witty and bold atheist*'. (Pg 25 Ibid. Bald identifies this Lyly as the husband of the poet John Donne's sister Anne. Pg 69 Bald, R.C. *Donne and the Drurys*, Cambridge University Press London 1959.) Hall complains that his requests for money were met only with 'a most military reply', '*I shewed him the insufficiency of my means: that I was forced to write books to buy books. Shortly some harsh and unpleasing answer so disheartened me, that I resolved to embrace the first opportunity of my remove.*'. Yet there were also opportunities, he was able to travel with the family to the Low Countries and was brought into contact with a range of influential figures.

Whilst resident at Hawstead Joseph Hall published several works. In 1605 he produced '*Mundus Alter et Idem*' (The same world, but different), an account of a journey taken through a set of Imaginary lands, a satirical Utopia in the 'morosophical' tradition of Thomas More and Erasmus. Some of the images in the chamber also appear in this work. The 'morosopher' is a figure whose apparent foolishness is revealed to contain greater knowledge than the supposedly wise. In writing this is manifested as a kind of shift, or set of reversals in which the readers initial judgements are opened to scrutiny. For an extensive discussion of this term see Screech, M.A, *Ecstasy and the Praise of folly*, Duckworth, London 1980,

<sup>112</sup> Anne Drury was a devout Protestant, and might be described as a Puritan, although the term should be used cautiously, later acquiring connotations which would be incorrect in this circumstance. Anne Drury does not seem to have been doctrinaire or bigoted, she kept friendly relations with local Catholic families.

<sup>113</sup> Pg 39 Hall Joseph (*Trans by John Miller Wands*), *Mundus Alter et Idem*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981 (Latin 1605). There are several interesting convergences of images to be found between this work and the panels in the chamber, for example the giant bird the Roc carrying of an elephant. However it is also to be noted that these are not employed identically in the chamber, perhaps indicating a variety of creative inputs into the panels. The date of this work 1605 perhaps reveals the intense creative atmosphere at Hawstead at that time.

Hall was to preach several sermons on the subject of images in which he returned precisely to this theme; that there was nothing wrong with using images as long as you did not confuse representation with the reality of what was represented.<sup>114</sup>

An analysis of Hall's dedication to Anne Drury indicates a close intellectual relationship,

*'if your long and gracious experience have written you a larger volume of wholesome laws and better informed you by precepts fetched from your own feeling than I can hope for from my bare speculation yet where these, my not unlikely rules shall accord with yours let your redoubled assent allow them and they confirm it. I made them not for the eye, but for the heart, neither do I commend them to your reading, but to your practice.'*<sup>115</sup>

The dedication accentuates the active, practice and experience above speculation. This reveals the influence of a 'Baconian' sense of experiment and discovery as well as religious practice. Thought is tested through application. Earlier George Estey had written in the book he dedicated to Lady Drury of a need for total self-examination, which he contrasts with the promptings of lust.

*'Let every one seek to find out the strange flesh his foul runneth after as his Bathsheba, which one may do by applying the whole word of God to his whole self constantly studying and meditating thereupon, making more account of the witness of our conscience than the judgements of others.'*<sup>116</sup>

The chamber is a place where such intense scrutiny could occur. Neither Hall nor Estey can be said to provide the complete intellectual grounding for the project. It would be equally valid to suggest that they were influenced by the Hawstead milieu.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Hall was invited to preach to the court of James I on this subject delivering a sermon entitled 'God's Impresse' (works Vol 5 Pg55-80) in which he denounced those who rejected images indiscriminately. For a discussion of Hall's attitude to images see D.C Mantz et al *'The Benefit of the Image without the Offence'* Pg253-277 in Westerweel, Bert (ed). *Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Field of the Emblems*, Brill, Leiden, 1997.

<sup>115</sup> Dedication to Meditations and Vowes Vol II 1604. The first book has a much more traditional dedication to Lord Drury as protocol dictated.. Reprinted in Hall Joseph, *Meditations and vows divine and moral (divided into two books)*, Humfrey Lownes for John Porter, London, 1606.

<sup>116</sup> Pg 5 Estey Rev George 'Certain Godly and Learned Dispositions Upon Diverse Parts of Scripture' Richard Bankworth, London 1603.

<sup>117</sup> The influence of Anne Drury's uncle Francis Bacon can be seen in the development of Hall's axiomatic style of writing in this period. The confident assertive tone of Puritan writing has often lead

The panels contain references to a huge range of information, from classical myths to the latest science. As well as a meeting of individuals the chamber can be viewed as an amalgamation of different books. The style and rhythm of the imagery is taken from emblem books. Another major visual reference for the panels is Gesner's *Natural History*, which provides direct models for several of the more exotic animals.<sup>118</sup> The Latin mottos are often quotations of classical sources. This information is transformed through the context of its inclusion, and sometimes actually altered. The observer is expected to have a degree of erudition in order to be able to detect these changes, and thereby explore the multiplicity of meanings the chamber presents.

If the chamber is viewed as a model of the world, it is a world that is revealed through human knowledge. The past is displayed through the classics, and far away lands through the reports of natural history. These 'knowledges' are brought together and assimilated into a finite and particular space, and shaped into a connected whole, open to an individual's examination.

This might be compared to early Christian works such as the Hexameron of St Ambrose, in which each of the six days of creation, as expounded in Genesis, were examined point by point. The aim of such works was to reject any alternative speculations as to the nature of the world, and its' coming into being. The constant refrain is one of faith; this is so because it is revealed in the bible to be so. Ambrose poses the question,

*'How then have things visible associated themselves with  
the invisible?'*<sup>119</sup>

The Hexameron uncovers the world of Genesis as a book of faith. The Painted Chamber is the opposite, revealing a world of doubt. The panels of the chamber show continuous strips of landscape, creating horizon lines for the occupant to regard. In this there seems to be a

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to the assumption that it was coupled with a similar degree of actual control. It has been suggested in connection with Lady Anne Drury that a '*Puritan Woman was virtually a semi-enclosed, semi-institutionalised child producing Nun*' Pg 262 (D.C Mantz et al '*The Benefit of the Image without the Offence*' Pg253-277 in Westerweel, Bert (ed). *Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Field of the Emblems*, Brill, Leiden, 1997.) However perhaps this is to confuse the desired situation of Puritan tracts with the actual world. Hall's disagreements with Lord Drury and William Lyly indicate that his influence was limited. Even the 'Right Virtuous' Anne Drury did not follow all of Hall's guidelines, choosing her own path on issues like the decoration of tombs. After her husband's death in 1616 she declined to remarry and ran the estate until her own death in 1626.

<sup>118</sup> For example the crocodile, the camel, the elephant, the whale, and crab can all be seen to have been copied from this source. Many other subtle correspondences occur. See Vol I Pg 172,410,983 Vol II Pg8 Vol III Pg 138, 179, 361, 719, 733 Gesner, Conrad, *Natura animalium (5 volumes)*, Christof Froshover Zurich. 1554-57.

<sup>119</sup> Hexameron of St Ambrose 7 (26) Pg 27 Ambrose (trans by John L Savage). *Hexameron*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 1961.

panoramic view of the entire world, and the variety of creatures within it, from this position it might be possible to undertake the ‘*Great Instauration*’ Anne Drury’s uncle, Francis Bacon’s great project, the reorganisation and classification of all knowledge.<sup>120</sup>

However the chamber also throws doubt on the efficacy of such methods, constantly generating doubt, denying rest or solution. Amongst the panels the figure of a philosopher is coupled with the motto ‘*Desipui Sapiendo*’, (wisdom has made me stupid). Another vainly tries to light a splint from a glow worm’s tail, ‘*Nil tamen impertit*’(but it imparts nothing).

The viewer is constantly returned to the knowledge that they are faced with and contained within an artificial construction. They are brought to consider how knowledge is accumulated, and how perception functions. The occupant of the chamber is in the position of ‘*applying their whole self*’ to the world, to exist both simultaneously with everything and also to know their limitation. Hall described this position, ‘*The mind of man though infinite in desire is finite in capacity*’.<sup>121</sup>

Although the absence of direct textual Biblical quotations is a noticeable feature of the chamber, a couple of the panels have oblique references through imagery.<sup>122</sup> The decorated sentences above the images appear to make more specific references. One of them states “*Frustra Nisi Dominus*” (In vain without the Lord), another “*Amplior In Coelo Domus Est*” (My heavenly home is large enough). The chamber differs in this respect from other murals contemporary to it. If as Cullum theorises, the Chamber was utilised as an Oratory, a place of prayer, then juxtaposition would occur between two ‘books’. The occupant’s reading and reciting of the Bible, is direct contact with the book of revelation. Alongside this is the ‘book of nature’, which consists the world of natural history as well as all the non-Christian

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<sup>120</sup> Bacon developed his plan for the ‘Great Instauration’ throughout his life, modelling Man’s rediscovery of the true nature of the world around the six days of the Biblical Creation. The first sentence of the volume published in 1620 runs ‘*Being convinced that the human intellect makes its own difficulties, not using the true helps which are at man’s disposal soberly and judiciously — whence follows manifold ignorance of things, and by reason of that ignorance mischiefs innumerable — he thought all trial should be made, whether that commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things, which is more precious than anything on earth, or at least than anything that is of the earth, might by any means be restored to its perfect and original condition, or if that may not be, yet reduced to a better condition than that in which it now is*’

<sup>121</sup> Pg184 Hall Joseph, *Meditations and vows divine and moral (divided into two books)*, Humfrey Lownes for John Porter, London, 1606.

<sup>122</sup> For example in ‘C.P.Q.R.’ Which shows a short sighted mole reading what appears to be a Bible on a lectern, surrounded by gold candlesticks. A Biblical quotation may shed light on it ‘*In that day shall a man cast away his goods of silver and gold into the holes of moles and bats*’ Isaiah 2:20. The message might be that even the short sighted Catholics will eventually come to read the Bible properly. The appearance of the thornless white rose in ‘O Puzzi, O Ponga’, is a Christian symbol associated with the Virgin Mary, (and also with alchemical imagery).

activities and creations of man. The uneasy operations of the human mind in attempting to negotiate knowledge of these two 'books' are externalised in the object of the Chamber.

The Painted closet becomes not a transcendental space of meditation, but rather an attempt to face the ambiguity of a universe formed from an entanglement of absent reality and present illusion.

This area of contested perception is similar to that found in many emblem books. Can the Chamber simply be regarded as an emblem book painted on a wall?

*The Painted Chamber as an Emblem Book.*

*'The stupidly idle are buried in the lethargy of the  
incapability of judging their own blindness, and the  
profitably zealous are aware, awakened, and prudent  
judges of their own blindness'*

Giordano Bruno, *De Gli Heroici Furori*, 1585.<sup>123</sup>

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the genre of the emblem book enjoyed a huge popularity throughout Europe. Each 'emblem' would consist of several elements. A short Latin motto, a drawing, and a verse or two of poetry. Each of these elements would relate in some fashion to the theme suggested by the motto. However these relationships were often oblique. The origin of the form is commonly attributed to the fifteenth century Italian humanist scholar Alciati. First acting as a diversion for the educated Latin speaking elite the genre developed into the vernacular languages of countries across the continent.<sup>124</sup> Alterations and modifications allowed these books to span political and religious divisions. An individual emblem image, or motto became public property and could unapologetically be recycled into a new context; the title page of Whitney's 'A Choice of Emblemes' plainly states that the contents are,

*'For the most parte gathered out of sundrie writers  
Englised and Moralized'.*<sup>125</sup>

Geoffrey Whitney in an introductory address to the reader of his work describes how the word emblem was derived from the Greek, and literally means to 'set in or to put in'.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Introduction to Bk IV in Memmo Jr, Paul Eugene, *Giordano Bruno's The Heroic Frenzies A Translation with Introduction and Notes*, Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures. No. 50, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill. 1964.

<sup>124</sup> For a complete account of the development of the Emblem book see Manning, John. *The Emblem*, Reaktion, London, 2002.

<sup>125</sup> Title page Whitney, Geoffrey. *A Choice of Emblemes*, House of J. Plantyn, Leyden, 1586.



Originally it would describe a design embossed into metal, or stone (an impression or 'imprese' on a shield perhaps) which has come to mean an arresting image which both snags and delights the eye. A trap. He describes three categories of emblem; Historical, Natural and Moral. Historical emblems depict the acts of people, natural emblems the behaviours of creatures, and moral emblems pertain to virtue and instruction. Moral emblems are the overarching form because,

*'all doe tende unto discipline, and morall precepts of living'.<sup>127</sup>*

The Emblem demands that the viewer engages in an active search to discover meanings. This establishes a practice of looking at the wider world, and of living an ethical life within it. It is a tool to identify the underlying characteristics of perceived reality.

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<sup>126</sup> Pg 5 Whitney, Geoffrey. *A Choice of Emblemes*, House of J. Plantyn, Leyden, 1586.

<sup>127</sup> Whitney also notes that there is a difference between the forms of '*Emblema, Symbolum & Enigma*', which he declines to further explore due to a desire for brevity. He directs the interested reader to '*divers others that have written thereof, wel knowne to the learned*' He specifically mentions the works of Alciati, Guiliel, Perrerus and Bochiuss Pg 5 *ibid*

### *Exterior and Interior Emblems*

Two major techniques of looking characterise the emblem. One is a movement from the exterior to the interior, the other the reverse of this.

The 'exterior' emblem presents the viewer with a representation of an occurrence in the natural world, a physical phenomenon or the particular or unusual action of an animal. Classic examples might be the sideways motion of a crab, the bird that feeds in a crocodile's mouth or the distortions of vision caused by placing an object under water. This natural history was usually gleaned not from observation, but from reading classical sources.<sup>128</sup> The images of the 'real' world are phantasms of scholarship. Each image is then taken to contain an ethical kernel. It is the demonstration of behaviour, an enactment, the contemplation of which allows a human to live a better life. This 'exterior' representation contains Whitney's historical and moral senses, through observation of the exemplary, the viewer is brought to knowledge.

In contrast the 'interior' emblem is a construction of several elements, images placed together to encapsulate a complex idea. Rather than a representation of the exterior world this becomes an allegorical construction, so a hand might contain an eye, or a tongue sprout wings and takes the form of a winged serpent. Here the image has become a symbol which may be chained to others to frame more complex meanings. The implication is that the world of books, like that of nature, has to be approached carefully. Images and texts cannot be assumed to be fixed securely, but have to be viewed with skill. The 'allegorical' nature of the images is not the manifestation of a precise syntax. It is better understood as an attempt at a hieroglyphic communication, the construction of a complex artefact that can communicate all the correct information simultaneously. The image is offered to the eye whole. It has an immediate impact, which will not be exhausted or decoded.

Emblem books demonstrate the schism at the heart of early modern humanist thought, the constant tension of the attempt to balance the power of revelation, of observation and of classical scholarship. The object of the book becomes both a receptacle of knowledge, and a source of doubt. In examining the relationship between image, motto, and moralising text the reader cannot help but reflect on their actions of looking and reading. The composition and display of imagery then exceeds the function of simply re-presenting mental facsimiles of objects and allow for an apprehension of the relationships of multiple perceptions.

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<sup>128</sup> Particularly the *Natural History*, of Pliny the Elder, (AD 23-79).

Perhaps the work that furthest extended the emblem in book form was Bruno's work of 1585, '*De Gli Heroici Furori*'.<sup>129</sup> Here the act of reflection is recorded as a dialogue; the journey through the work also becomes a process of meditation upon existence. This meditation is deeply infused with Neo-Platonism, moving from general observation to perceived universal truth. Bruno's use of emblems is highly idiosyncratic, part of his program of philosophical evangelism.<sup>130</sup> He provides a clear description of how an individual reader might engage with the formal organisation of such books, moving from image to analysis to poetry. For Bruno each element is a stage to be worked through in order for the reader to reach a state that combines an emotional and intellectual purification. The following passage is one of several descriptions of the reflection on emblems described within the dialogue.

*CESARINO: Let us look at the following emblem which depicts a wheel of time moving about its own center, with the motto, Manens Moveor ('While standing fixed, I am moved'). How do you understand this?*

(Cesarino is the classic passive figure within the dialogue, a device for positing the questions that Bruno wishes to answer. This question is comprehensively answered with a well-structured monologue).

*MARICOND: It means that the wheel turns upon itself, so that motion and rest concur, for the spherical motion of a body upon its own axis and its own centre implies the rest and immobility associated with rectilinear motion; or, one may say, there is a certain repose of the whole and a motion of its parts; and the parts which are moved in a circle have two kinds of alternate movement, inasmuch as some parts ascend to the summit, while others in turn descend to the bottom; some parts remain in an intermediate position, and some remain in the extreme position either at the top or bottom. And it appears that all this has to do with the subject of the following sonnet:*

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<sup>129</sup> Bruno, Giordano, *De Gli Heroici Furori*, Appresso Antonio Baio: Parigi, 1585. The title of this work is usually translated as "The Heroic Frenzies". For a detailed analysis of this work see Memmo Jr, Paul Eugene. *Giordano Bruno's The Heroic Frenzies A Translation with Introduction and Notes* Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures No 50, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1964,

<sup>130</sup> Bruno's ideas are explored at length by Frances Yates particularly in Yates, F. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Routledge, London, 1964.

*That which my heart holds both clear and obscure,  
 beauty engraves in me,  
 but humility erases.*  
*Zeal sustains me, but another care brings me to the source  
 of all the labors of my soul.*  
*When I think of tearing myself away from the pain,  
 hope revives me, (while) the vigor of another thought binds  
 me;*  
*while love raises me, reverence debases me as  
 I aspire to the noblest and the highest good.*  
*Lofty thought, holy desire, and intense zeal of mind, heart,  
 and labour, to the immortal, divine but immense object join  
 me, enwrap me in it,  
 and cause it to nourish me.*  
*No longer may my mind, reason, and sense strive elsewhere,  
 discourse,  
 or become elsewhere entangled.*  
*So that one may say of me: This one who has now fixed his  
 eyes upon the sun,  
 and, become a rival of Endymion, is grieved.*

*Therefore, the continual motion of the one part of the wheel  
 supposes and leads with it the motion of the whole, and the  
 hurling down of the upper parts causes a drawing up of the  
 lower parts; thus, the impulsion given by the superior parts  
 necessarily results in the inducement of the inferior ones,  
 and from the descent of a potency follows the ascent of the  
 opposite potency. At this point the heart (which represents  
 all the affections in general) becomes obscure and  
 translucent, restrained by its zeal, raised by magnificent  
 thoughts, reinforced with hope, weakened by fear. And in  
 this state and condition those who find themselves subject to  
 the destiny of generation will ever be seen.<sup>131</sup>*

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<sup>131</sup> Book V Memmo Jr, Paul Eugene, *Giordano Bruno's The Heroic Frenzies A Translation with Introduction and Notes* Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures No 50, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1964,

Bruno's account is an accumulation of such reflections, which is also a model of the souls movement towards the divine. Ultimately the book is not an emblem book. It is a report, a recollection of the reading of an emblem book. He describes the movements of thought in time that occur whilst the emblems are regarded. The viewer is invited to occupy a dual position, simultaneously, to perform and to reflect.

This auto-reflection is also a key attribute of the painted chamber. To regard an emblem demands that the viewer constantly attempts to carry one kind of knowledge, say the recognition of an animal, to another, say an account of a specific behaviour. Memory and perception are intertwined. Calls to the authority of the observations of Classical authors reveal many separations, divisions of time and place. The mind is revealed as an artefact constructed from memory and perceptions shaped into a cloud of knowing.

The comparison of the Painted Chamber to the genre of emblem books is both illuminating and also misleading. Although there are many shared influences these can lead to an under appreciation of the differences. Partly this is a problem of form. Transmission of information about the chamber has largely occurred through books. The space has been flattened and divided, the panels shown individually within streams of text. Understandably this has accentuated the 'book like' nature of the Chamber.

The imagery within the chamber is firmly within the tradition of Emblem books, although only two of the panels appear to be copies of existing images.<sup>132</sup> Some themes have been significantly altered whilst others appear to be completely original. The same pattern occurs with the mottos. Some are well known, whereas the majority are novel, or subtle alterations.<sup>133</sup> Within the chamber the image is more prominent and the text reduced to one line in each panel. Here the image does more work than in an emblem book.

The immersive quality of the chamber defines it as something completely other than a book. Whereas the movement through an emblem book would possess a set flow, each emblem following and obscuring the previous one. The chamber allows a simultaneous display of all. The morals of the emblem book appear completely persuasive and logical in isolation, each page a discontinuous plane. In the chamber the full impact of all the moralising is available at once. The viewer is presented with the challenge of producing continuity from this complexity. The physical arrangement of the image in the space of the chamber is crucial to its operation. The viewer is completely immersed within the space. The eyes might leap from

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<sup>132</sup> The panel featuring the flying tongue "Qua Tendis" is a direct copy of the same device in Claude Paradin. The ape throwing money from the window in 'Ut Parta Labuntur' is taken from Whitney's *A choice of Emblems*, although the motto is altered.

<sup>133</sup> 'Spem Fronte', 'Fronti Nulla Fides' and 'Sic Orbis Iter' can be found used in emblem books and poetry.

one panel to the next, or follow patterns. The panels are arranged in thematic pairs and trios, which themselves can be seen as forming patterns with other sets. Rather than the fixed sequential movement along a line of text within a book, the viewer is faced with a simultaneous onrush of information. The contents of the panels bleed into each other and therefore interrupt each other. Whereas the book contains and organises knowledge, the Chamber contains and surrounds the viewer, it both reveals and becomes the bubble of perception from which knowledge is to be gleaned.

The Painted chamber differs markedly from emblem books in its use of text. The panels have only a small motto, and no explanatory gloss, or poetry. The bulk of the mottos are drawn from Classical authors, often from poems. These lines are sometimes tellingly altered. The Chamber presents Classical authority in a playful form, the words are un-attributed, and they draw potency from their meaning rather than links to Classical authorities.<sup>134</sup> The tone of the Chamber is satirical rather than prescriptive. The work of the viewer is to attempt combinations. Often the connection is oblique, perhaps reversing the initial impression of what is occurring. The motto might lead the viewer to remember the poem from which it was extracted. Here they will not find a clear assertion of ethical values, but a further complexity. The chamber sets up movements between these layers of knowledge, which the viewer must navigate.

This meta-text often works as a counterpoint to the immediately discerned meaning. An examination of the panel *'Iam sumus ergo pares'* (*In this we are therefore equal*) indicates the complexity of these relationships.

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<sup>134</sup> The conventional use of Classical authorities was to bolster the authors credentials as a man of knowledge. Whitney's introduction to his work follows an accepted format, whereby scholarship is asserted through linking all claims directly to a previous authority. The result is the production of a huge list of names. The reader must assume that this list represents a compression of knowledge, which if expanded would form a seamless whole.

*In This We Are Therefore Equal.*

A man stands, or walks behind a swan, the swan is disproportionably small. The man is dark skinned and almost naked, clothed only in a white cloth wrapped like a dhobi.<sup>135</sup> With his left hand he exposes and points to his white teeth, with his right he points toward the swan.

Above the swan floats the motto,

*"Iam sumus ergo pares".*<sup>136</sup>

In this we are therefore equal.

The man appears to be making a comparison between himself and swan. It is a comparison based on a reversal of colouration. The man has white teeth beneath his dark skin, whereas the swan's black legs show a dark skin hidden beneath its white feathers. The swan paradoxically represents both purity and hypocrisy.<sup>137</sup> To return to the statement of the motto, there is equality in that both swan and man have dark skin. The man through his action indicates that there is a further equality in that beneath the first perceived exterior lays a contrary appearance, white feathers, dark skin, dark skin, white teeth.<sup>138</sup>

This far the panel would seem to be centred on revealing the deceitfulness of a world formed from perception overlaid with perception. A further consideration of the man complicates this balance between oppositional colours. His role is different from the swan. He is making a point, demonstrating something through his actions. There is no communication between him

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<sup>135</sup> This image can be compared to *Intus idem*. There the figure is dressed in European clothes, here in what seems more like an imagined 'native' garb.

<sup>136</sup> This is a quotation of the repeated refrain contained in Martial's Epigram II 18. It is worth reproducing this in full-

*I angle for a dinner invitation from you Maximus,  
(to my shame I say it but it's true)  
You do the same from someone else  
In this we are therefore equal. (Iam sumus ergo pares)  
I go to your levee in the morning  
And hear you have already gone to another  
In this we are therefore equal. (Iam sumus ergo pares)  
I escort you, walking in front of my pompous patron,  
And you escort someone else.  
In this we are therefore equal. (Iam sumus ergo pares)  
It is enough to be a servant,  
I won't be a servants servant  
A king Maximus, should not have a king.*

<sup>137</sup> Joseph Hall discusses this characteristic of the swan in meditations and vows 1 no 67

See also Mantz et al Pg 272 *The Benefit of an image, without the offence* in

Bart Westerweel(ed) *Anglo Dutch relations in the field of the Emblem* Brill, Leiden, 1997.

<sup>138</sup> The notion that judgements could not be safely made from appearances was explored by Joseph Hall in his meditation 38 'Upon the sight of a Blackamoor'.

He writes "we should be looked upon in this mans country with no less wonder and strange coyness than he is here; our whiteness would pass there for an unpleasing indigestion of form... In every colour that is fair which pleaseth; the very spouse of Christ can say, I am black but comely."

and the swan as he stands behind it. The most apparent audience for his act of display would seem to be the external viewer who looks into the panel.<sup>139</sup> The man does not catch our gaze he appears to be looking ahead over the swan. His actions appear almost as a sly aside behind the back of the one to which it refers.

The motto in this consideration might be remembered in the context of the epigram from which it is extracted. Martial describes walking dutifully with his pompous patron; they are equal in all things except that the patron has no awareness of his true position, like the swan in the panel.<sup>140</sup> Here the disproportionate size of the swan could become part of this imbalance, the giant servant dwarfs the swan he follows. The panel in this reflects upon equality of fault or vice which is not balanced with an equality of self-knowledge.

In turning to the swan the panel can be opened to a further examination. A well-known pun has been worked on 'cygno', (the Latin for swan) in which it was transformed to 'signo' (a sign, gesture, mark).<sup>141</sup> This pun is multiplied into the panel with its arrangement of cygno/swan and signo/gesturing man. The motto might then be thought to imply equality to a wide range of signs within the panel; the swan itself as a pun, the gesture of comparison the man makes, pointing to the swan, and towards his mouth.<sup>142</sup>

In this an equation is formed between the mouth and the cygno/signo. A conversation takes place though the painting is mute (like the swan, like the painted man). The importance of the gesture of recognition is reaffirmed as the manner in which any kind of interruption might be fashioned amidst the constantly shifting layers of illusion presented to our perception.

This might relate directly to the figure of the painter in the panel "*Dic mihi, qualis eris?*" (Tell me how you will behave?).

*Tell Me, If You Were Made A Lion, How Would You Behave?*

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<sup>139</sup> This can be compared to the interruptions of the picture plane in *Dic mihi, qualis eris?*

<sup>140</sup> The swan was closely associated with royalty, and all swans were considered crown property, which can perhaps be related to Martial's last lines when he states that kings can have no kings- here perhaps there is a social criticism of the pretensions of those who served at court. If any criticism of royalty itself is intended it is necessarily well hidden.

<sup>141</sup> Most famously associated with the Roman Emperor Constantine, who seeing the constellation of the Swan (which form a cross) before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge stated 'In hoc signo vinces' In that swan/sign victory. The swan/sign pun was also Henry V's personal badge.

<sup>142</sup> In the same manner the eye is the ultimate focus in *Dic mihi, qualis eris?*



A painter sits on a three-legged stool, palette, brushes and marl stick in his left hand, brush in the right. He is sitting beneath a tree in the Sun's light, working on a portrait that sits upon an easel, angled so the work in progress is fully visible to the viewer.

The painting on the easel is only partially completed. It appears to be a head and shoulders portrait of a woman. She stares outwards meeting the gaze of anyone who looks at the panel.

The painter is depicted at the point of making a mark, hand outstretched, wrist supported by the marl stick. He is in the act of painting the woman's left eye. It is hard to discern whether the eye has actually been rendered or whether the dark mark is the paint loaded brush at the very moment the eye is to be formed.

Beneath the easel floats the motto

"Dic mihi, qualis eris?"<sup>143</sup>

Tell me how you will behave?

This appears to be a modification of one of the epigrams of Martial "Dic mihi, si fias tu leo, Qualis eris?" Tell me, if you were made a lion, how would you behave?

This panel creates a web of interrogation, examination of the eye, mouth and ear.

The most apparent exchange would be that between the painter and his painting. His look is concentrated there, focussing on the mark he is making, concerned with successfully finishing this particular work. Immediately an ambiguity emerges, does the artist question the painting or the subject depicted?

If the object is questioned, then the question is ultimately self-examination, "what will my skill as a painter produce?" This skill has to become manifest as the precise moment of contact of brush, painting and artists gaze. It is impossible to choose one of these as the absolute location of knowledge. The answer to how the painting 'will behave' loops between the action of hand, the mind and the object itself. The painter has to represent his authorship to himself in order to produce the work, to conjoin an idea of a future finishing, with the demands of the present object.

The moment at which the painter marks the second eye of his subject, is also the point at which the portrait can return this gaze within the panel.<sup>144</sup> So here the question 'How will you

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<sup>143</sup> Martial Epigrams XII no 93

<sup>144</sup> 'Look him in the face... and then, as a picture looks upon him that looks upon it, God upon whom thou keepest thy eye, will keep his eye upon thee' John Donne Sermon (4:130). Donne had close links

behave?” may be directed to the subject rather than the painting as object. This is a moment in capturing a likeness, and also one of questioning what this likeness can contain, what knowledge will be apprehended within this portrait. The painter asks the painting to speak, as if this made likeness can reveal information that a direct encounter cannot. What cannot speak is asked to speak in the place of what actually has a voice.<sup>145</sup>

Within this panel there is an intimation of the power of the action of portrayal to form the nature of what is portrayed. So the question of the panel is also directed to the painter asking “how will you use this power?”. This must be applied in parallel to both painters involved with the panel; the painter of the panel addressing their work, just as the painter within the panel addresses the portrait. Two loops occur. One of these loops occurs within the panel, the other extends outwards connecting the picture plane with the world outside. The point at which these two intersect is also the point where brush, paint and portrait intersect. All meet at the portrait’s eye. In fact the painters stance, the line of brush, hand, marl stick and palette, all direct the viewer’s eye to this point.

This panel draws the observer into a looping consideration of recognition, making and distance. Its’ focus on the eye of the painting within the painting directly meets the gaze (perhaps a mirror to the original fabricator of the chamber). It is a demonstration of a human’s perceptual limitations but also of how through reflection and questioning we might negotiate this unavoidable condition.<sup>146</sup>

In the chamber the thin skin of pigment presents and thereby seems to contain thought. By totally enclosing the viewer within the picture plane it accentuates the physicality of the space, grounds it within the wider world. The viewer is not in the comfortable position of the guest of a gesturing connoisseur in a Cabinet painting. They are tumbling and falling and

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with the Drury family, his poem ‘The Anniversarie’ was written to commemorate the death of their only child Elizabeth. For a analysis of Donne’s attitude to imagery see Hurley, Ann Hollinshead. *John Donne’s Poetry and early modern Visual culture*, Susquehanna University Press, Selinsgrove 2005.

<sup>145</sup> The relationship between portrayed and portrayer is given a further symmetry with a speculative consideration of biographical information. The figure of the painter depicted in the panels bears a marked resemblance to existing portraits of Lady Drury’s brother Nicholas Bacon, a highly accomplished painter. Amongst the paintings listed in his will was a portrait of Anne Drury It is very likely that he executed this himself, although the painting itself has disappeared. It is possible to conjecture a situation of an mirror portrayal occurring, Anne Drury and her brother execute simultaneous descriptions of each other. The question might then be re-examined in light of its relation to Martial’s epigram, if you were different, if you were a lion how would you behave? Sister and brother share the same background the same influences. What determines how they behave, what makes them. Are they separate and ultimately alone, divided, or somehow bonded together? See Pgs 6, 12,14,18, 32. Hearn, K. *Nicholas Bacon Artist, Gentleman, Gardener*, Tate Publishing, London 2005.

<sup>146</sup> Which is also explored in other panels “*Fronti Nulla Fides*” “*Sic orbis iter*” N K. Farmer identifies a link between this panel and the image that accompanies Pg 100 Whitney’s *Fronta Nulla Fides* in a “A choice of Emblems” (1586). There is a shared use of the image of the incomplete portrait, but beyond that the comparison is made less useful by the numerous differences. As Farmer observes the motto is connected to a completely different image.

unable to find purchase in the flat static space, a condition perfectly described in one of the panels, *Fruor Nec Quiesco* (*There is no rest here*).

*There Is No Rest Here.*

This panel is dominated by a red hawk, depicted on the wing, at the very moment in which it has caught its prey, a blackbird.<sup>147</sup> Beneath the hawk floats the motto, “*Fruor Nec Quiesco*”. (*There is no rest here*).

This momentarily frozen image forces the viewer into the future or into the past, imagining the chase and impact, the tumbling flight as the hawk curls itself to a loop, and the tearing of beak and claws.<sup>148</sup>

The motto describes a state of simultaneous satisfaction and need. In the moment of capture and of fulfilling the role to which it is most suited the hawk cannot rest. Its’ situation is precarious, depicted hanging in the sky, caught between wing beats. The viewer knows it must now continue to fly or fall.

The hawk must soon return to the hunt. Likewise the image of the hawk may give rise to certain ideas. Thoughts of transcendence and holy union. It does not transcend. It persists as a

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<sup>147</sup> The red hawk appears in a series of panels, *Non Vacat Exiguus*, *Pie Sed Temere*, *Speravi et Perii*. It is perhaps Anne Drury’s personal emblem.

<sup>148</sup> The image of the hawk hunting over the land was commonly used as a metaphor for the Christian soul’s search for God. The hawk’s high soaring flight compared to an attempt to ascend towards heaven. Its’ hunting compared to the constant self searching needed to lead a Christian life. The viewer might also apply the motto to the blackbird. Is death good for the Christian who believes in the perfection of the afterlife? The thought returns the mind to the act of searching. Joseph Hall develops this metaphor extensively in his *Occasional Meditations* in which he compares the ease with which a ‘little lark’ ascends to heaven compared to the bigger swifter hawk, which must move by ‘many gradual compasses’. He asks the reader to consider how this might also be with people; that those of great power or knowledge may actually find it hinders them in seeking the happiness of heaven. XXXV *Upon the sight of a Lark flying Up* Hall, J. *Occasional Meditations*. Nathaniel Butler, London, 1633. A further complexity to this panel may well have been obvious to the erudite viewer. The red hawk consumes the smaller black bird in an image which could be interpreted using the visual language of alchemy. The blackbird as the beginning stage of nigredo, darkness, transformed into the highest stage, rubedo, red gold. Such transformation was certainly considered by ‘philosophical’ adepts to be a matter of the soul rather than the crucible. However the motto again undercuts any notion of permanent alteration, the action of seeking cannot be halted. See Pg 23 Pg 44 Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery

painting, an illusion of movement. The viewer is invited to compare their action of apprehending the panel to the hawks in grasping the blackbird.

Finally the viewer might consider how the hawk suspended mirrors their own position; suspended and surrounded within the panelled chamber, eyes scanning and searching. The transitory moment in which something may be caught hold of provides sustenance but not completeness. Is this to be empty or full?

Within the Chamber a different sense of time emerges, each linear pathway reveals itself as a loop. The maps of meaning, which are overlaid on the panels gradually accumulate. Ink as text and image fills every gap and transforms every panel into a black square.

# V

## LEAVING THE PATHS OF ART

*Within the surface*

*The Zaum Constellation. The pulverisation of image and word. The Victory Over the Sun. The emergence of the Black Square. 1913.*

*'The curtain depicts a black square, the embryo of all possibilities- in its development it acquires a terrible strength. It is the ancestor of the cube and the sphere; its disintegration brings an amazing standard in painting.'*<sup>149</sup>

In 1913 Kazimir Malevich collaborated with Matiushin and Kruchenykh in the production of the futurist opera *'The Victory Over the Sun'*. The costume and set designs created by Malevich were a crucial element of the concept of the work. Malevich envisaged the stage as a cube, which imprisons and contains.

These designs became hugely important for the artist and it is at exactly this point in 1913 that he dated the beginning of his Suprematist system, and the emergence of the Black Square. In May 1915 he wrote to Matiushin concerning plans to publish the libretto of the opera and to include some of the stage designs in the publication. Malevich asks that a particular design be included

*'That drawing will have great significance in painting. That which was done unconsciously now bears extraordinary fruit.'*<sup>150</sup>

By the end of 1913 Malevich had developed a particular and personal view of time and the flow of causality. His position was defined by the process of rejection, a space formed by what it was not. It was not to be an esoteric spirituality like that of Ouspensky, whose otherworldliness allowed for an indifference to the injustices of society. Nor was it to be Marinetti's concern with technology and modernity. The *'Budetlayn'* (the title the more

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<sup>149</sup> *Letter from Malevich to Matiushin 29 May 1915* Quoted Pg 64 Douglas, Charlotte. *Swans of Other Worlds, Kazimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1980. The study of Malevich orbits around certain artefacts and documents. There is a wealth of material available in the artist's own theoretical writings, many of which have been translated. Other more personal correspondence is often recycled in theoretical accounts as it frequently throws light on the artists thought. However this direct access to the artists voice can be misleading, suggesting a completeness which is not actually present.

The confusion of recent Russian history has resulted in the loss of many works.

Malevich's writing is often treated as a undifferentiated lump from which pieces can be taken from widely differing times. This is often necessary in presenting a functional account of the theoretical writings- however it is also problematic in that it imposes an ordering which is in fact often not present. This retro-active rationalisation tends to privilege certain elements assumed to be core, whilst excising the messy process of associative connection which the artist held to be vital.

The oppressive nature of state power also led to deliberate secrecy. For example it has been suggested that Malevich's return to rural subjects was a response to the suffering and starvation caused by Stalin's enforced collectivisation program in the late twenties, of which Malevich was particularly aware because of family links with the Ukraine. Certain references in drawings do suggest direct criticism of the state, but these were necessarily well hidden. Because of this difficulty these elements are not present in most existing accounts of the artist which focus on his theoretical artistic theories.

<sup>150</sup> *Letter from Malevich to Matiushin 27 May 1915* Quoted Pg 64 Douglas, Charlotte. *Swans of Other Worlds, Kazimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1980

Russo-centric artists preferred to the European ‘Futurist’)<sup>151</sup> were not interested in the ‘future’ as a progression of time into a technological plenitude.<sup>152</sup> The ‘will-be’ land is an evolution of the mind, an imminent presence that has to be individually realised, a slip and side step away. *‘Long ago painters conquered time and consequently space, whereas technology is still trying to fight its way through an open door.’*<sup>153</sup>

All those closely associated with the production of ‘The Victory Over the Sun’<sup>154</sup> shared the conviction that they were undergoing a process of perceptual evolution. The program of the Budetlayn was to communicate this information to the world to demonstrate and proselytise their transformation. After meeting at Uusikirkko a statement was issued outlining their aims.

*‘To destroy the antiquated movement of thought according to the law of causality, the toothless common sense, the ‘symmetrical logic’ wandering about in the blue shadows of Symbolism and to give personal creative enlightenment of the real world of new people’*<sup>155</sup>

The ideological foundation of these divergent ideas was articulated in the concept ‘Zaum’.

#### *The Zaum Constellation*

*‘My contemporaries form a non-rational constellation of the live spirit, outside the rational cultural order. This non-objective zaum-spirit will leave the paths of art. My contemporaries see for man in the zaum constellation...’*<sup>156</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Coined by Khlebnikov it translates into something like ‘Will Be Men’ or ‘Future dwellers’. See introduction Markov, Vladimir. *Russian Futurism; A History*, MacGibbon & Kee Ltd, London, 1968.

<sup>152</sup> This was the crux of Malevich’s dislike of Constructivism, ‘entrapped by the idea of the automaton’ as before man had been trapped by church and state. This is very clearly stated in his letter to Kurt Schwitters Pg 160 Malevich, Kasimir. (trans by Hoffman, X) Anderson, Troels (ed) *The Artist, Infinity Suprematism*. Unpublished Writings 1913-1933, Vol 1V. Borgen, Copenhagen, 1978.

<sup>153</sup> Pg162 *ibid*.

<sup>154</sup> The script was written by Kruchenykh, with a prologue by Khlebnikov. The music was by Matiushin and the visual design by Malevich. All involved had been trained as painters.

<sup>155</sup> The entire text of this ‘Chronicle’ of the meeting is reproduced Pg 35-36 Douglas, Charlotte. *Swans of Other Worlds, Kazimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1980.

<sup>156</sup> ‘*About Zangezi*’ 1922-23 (Private Notebook) In this piece of writing Malevich reflects on the death of Khlebnikov. Pg96 Malevich, Kasimir. (trans by Hoffman, X) Anderson, Troels (ed) *The Artist, Infinity Suprematism*. Unpublished Writings 1913-1933, Vol 1V. Borgen, Copenhagen, 1978.

Zaum (pronounced za-oom) was the term coined by Alexi Kruchenykh to describe the character of the poetry of the Budetlayn, the 'will-be language'.<sup>157</sup> It grew from this to become a general term descriptive of a perceptual/philosophical condition, a practice of 'zaumniks'. The word is a neologism constructed from the Russian terms 'um', mind and 'za' going outside, a going beyond, (in the sense of beyond the walls). Peter Schmidt translates zaum as 'beyonsense'.<sup>158</sup> The state of zaum is transrational, but not nonsensical, or anti-rational. It is not a negative or lack of 'sense', it is an intimation of reason and understanding which operates in more diverse ways and areas than are contained within the traditional conception of rationality as a conscious ordering.<sup>159</sup>

Zaum can function with words and images, within art and science, breaking down all borders between humanity and the world.<sup>160</sup> Meaning is not fixed but moves between shape and sound. Zaumniks pulverise hardened forms into essential particles, roots and prefixes. Shifting tenses can be isolated and recombined into new arrangements. These arrangements act directly on the consciousness, revealing the rhythmic core of existence. The image of the constellation is a description of the process whereby the ideas of individual people, each with their own distinct orbital paths can spin into larger more observable arrangements. These large patterns allow for the brief emergence of fugitive systems of measurement.

*'Any constellation is merely a drawing of the geometry of  
the stars; in reality every star in what we see as a*

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<sup>157</sup> The term first appeared in the manifesto 'The Declaration of the Word as Such' This leaflet contains a series of paragraphs, numbered, but in no apparent order (4,5,2,,3,1,6,7,8). The first paragraph, numbered 4 declared, '(4)Thought and speech cannot keep up with Someone in a state of Inspiration, therefore the artist is free to express himself not only in the common language (concepts) but also in a personal one (the creator as an individual) as well as in a language that does not have any definite meaning (not frozen), beyonsense language (zaumy yazyt). 'Slovo Kak Takovoe' A fifteen page pamphlet dated April 19<sup>th</sup> 1913 but published in September of that year alongside 'Troie'. The 'Word as Such' was a textual collaboration between Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov with visual work by Malevich and Olga Rozanova. The book explores theory through combinations of statements, poems and images. See Janacek, Gerald. *Zaum, The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism*. San Diego State University Press, Calxico 1996. For a different account see Pg129-132 Markov, Vladimir. *Russian Futurism; A History*, MacGibbon & Kee Ltd, London, 1968. Markov is concerned to elevate the status of Khlebnikov as a significant poet, and innovator.

<sup>158</sup> Pg 3 Khlebnikov, Velimir (trans by Schmidt, P). *The King of Time*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985. For an excellent account of Zaum in general and valuable re-evaluation of the impact of Kruchenykh's often underrated work see Janacek, Gerald. *Zaum, The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism*. San Diego State University Press, Calxico 1996.

<sup>159</sup> Pg 1 Janacek, Gerald. *Zaum, The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism*. San Diego State University Press, Calxico 1996.

<sup>160</sup> To Khlebnikov this also meant breaking down the barriers between animals and man. When he announced his Laws of Destiny he stated (reminiscent of Gulliver living with the Houyhnhnms, that if mankind did not want his laws he would teach them to the 'enslaved race of horses', who had helped him discover them. Pg 171 Khlebnikov, Velimir (trans by Schmidt, P). *The King of Time*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985.



*configuration is completely independent, situated at an enormous distance from one another.*<sup>161</sup>

‘Constellation’ is a description of a recurrent process linking micro and macrocosmic movement. The Zaum constellation is a new ordering of the mind accepting the conjunctions of intuition, perception and rationality as knowledge. This is produced through associative links operating within thought and practice.

The constellation retains a ‘particular’ nature. The lumps of ‘sound-meaning’, which the Zaum poets sought to uncover bear, a close relation to the ‘supreme’ forms, whose movements Malevich explored. From 1913 onwards the theories of painting and poetry were developed in tandem with conscious overlapping, and a promiscuous experimentation with media.<sup>162</sup> The concept of Zaum was easily transferred to painting. Malevich describes Zaum as ‘*free order*’, construction beyond the imprisonment of form. Time exerts a kind of gravity, which can also be understood as mental force, creating a ‘*system of events, reason, numerals and language*’.<sup>163</sup>

Constellation is presented by Malevich as the overarching organisational form for social and artistic construction. This free ordering functions in painting and poetry, disrupting ‘frozen’ forms and allowing creation. Creation is movement within the apparent fullness, the completed-ness of the world as such. The production of books and the Budetlayn theatre also worked on this principle, bringing together individual explorations and extending them through the complexity generated by association.<sup>164</sup>

### *The Victory Over the Sun*

*‘You know poetry up to now was like a stained glass window, and like the suns rays passing through the panes, romantic demonism imparted picturesque-ness to it.*

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<sup>161</sup> Pg96 Malevich, Kasimir. (trans by Hoffman, X) Anderson, Troels (ed) *The Artist, Infinity Suprematism*. Unpublished Writings 1913-1933, Vol 1V. Borgen, Copenhagen, 1978.

<sup>162</sup> Khlebnikov and Matiushin experimented with painting and Malevich with poetry. Kruchenykh’s books involved a huge variety of hand and machine made visual experiments with form.

<sup>163</sup> Pg97 Malevich, Kasimir. (trans by Hoffman, X) Anderson, Troels (ed) *The Artist, Infinity Suprematism*. Unpublished Writings 1913-1933, Vol 1V. Borgen, Copenhagen, 1978.

Malevich identifies Khlebnikov as choosing to operate within this orbit, bringing clarity through his work with the ‘boards of fate’. Malevich and Kruchonykh are operating within the ‘*nebulous mist of the affairs of the universe*’ Pg 94.

<sup>164</sup> For an overview of the collaborative book production of this period see- Compton, Susan. *The World Backwards Russian Futurist Books 1912-16*, The British Library, London, 1978.

*But here is Victory Over the Sun and the f-ray (from your own works). The glass is blown up, from the fragments of it... we create designs for the sake of liberation from demonism, from nothing we create any convention whatsoever*<sup>165</sup>

The staging of the 'Victory Over the Sun' at the Luna Park theatre in December 1913 was a transforming moment for the Russian avant-garde. It was performed only twice, alternating with Mayakovsky's work '*Vladimir Mayakovsky, a tragedy*', but had a huge impact. The work went beyond previous Futurist actions that sought only to agitate the general public. It was an ambitious large-scale work containing a complex artistic and social program.<sup>166</sup> The Opera specifically deals with the idea of an evolution of consciousness.<sup>167</sup>

The Victory Over the Sun describes a world of change. The play begins with two strongmen ripping through the curtain that covers the stage.

The last scene of the first act begins with someone receiving a phone call

*'What the Sun is imprisoned!  
Thank you'*<sup>168</sup>

In this matter of fact way, the central action of the work is announced to the audience. Now the world stops moving, the sun has been wrenched out of its position and its 'smell of mathematics'. Guns and wheels melt like wax and in the new 'Tenth Country'

*'Our faces are dark*

<sup>165</sup> Letter from Jakobson to Kruchonykh Jan/Feb 1914 Pg 104 Jakobson, Roman (*trans by Stephen Rudy*). *My Futurist Years*, Marsilio, New York, 1997.

<sup>166</sup> The opera was performed largely by a non-professional cast, with the dissonant score played by Matiushin on a specially selected dilapidated piano. Kruchonykh encouraged the largely amateur cast to pronounce each syllable of each word, breaking speech down into a succession of particles. He was delighted with a fast 'pattering' style mastered by one actor. The manner of movement and delivery made it clear that the text did not govern the development of the play, nor even adequately describe any of the events, which largely occur offstage. Kruchonykh described how, '*the performers moved as if tied together and controlled by the rhythm of the artist and director*'. The entire work was conceived as an interlocking series of machine movements, a zaum construction in which individual strings of reason are engulfed by wider perspective. Pg67 Kruchonykh, Alexi. *Our Arrival, From the History of Russian Futurism*. RA, Moscow, 1995. For an overview of the work and a translation of the text see *The Victory over the Sun*, TDR (Tulane Drama Review) Vol 15, no 4, 1979. (*abr VOTS, TDR*)

<sup>151</sup> Another theme of the work is a Futurist attack on the art of the past generation. The 'effeminate' Symbolist worship of classical imagery and nature is to be replaced with the 'masculine' Russian new age of the future. Kruchonykh described, '*an attempt to pave the way for the male epoch, to replace the effeminate Apollinarians and slatternly Aphrodites*' Pg60 Kruchonykh, Alexi. *Our Arrival, From the History of Russian Futurism*. RA, Moscow, 1995. Significantly the once radical magazine 'Apollon', the celebration of the Sun god had come to represent the conservative art that the Futurist world opposed Pg66 Gray, Camilla. *The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1962.

<sup>168</sup> Pg116 A. Kruchonykh trans by Bartos, Ewa & Nel Kirby, Victoria. *The Victory over the Sun*, TDR (Tulane Drama Review) Vol 15, no 4, 1979. *Following notes Abr VOTS, TDR*.

*Our Light comes from Inside*'.<sup>169</sup>

By the Second act Zaum phrases pepper language, and time no longer governs humanity. This has been achieved through the humans' ability to imprison the Sun, which symbolises the everyday and the normal appearance of the world. Now humanity is illuminated from within, the will-be world has moved beyond force and into a kind of freedom.

The Second Act of the Opera takes place entirely in the 'Tenth Country'. The timeless 'will-be' land brought about by the imprisonment of the Sun. The place described is not a utopia; it is shifting and confusing. The opening stage directions read,

*'Exterior walls of houses appear but the windows go toward  
the inside in a strange way as if they are pipes drilled  
through the walls. Many windows, placed in irregular rows  
and they seem to be moving in a suspicious way.'*<sup>170</sup>

It seems there is no sense of time, and perhaps even no need to breathe, a 'deep emptiness'. A fat man who has apparently slept through the changes awakes distressed. He is told,

*'liberated from the weight of the earth's gravitation we  
whimsically arrange our belongings as if a rich kingdom  
were moving.'*<sup>171</sup>

In the sixth scene the Fat Man launches into a soliloquy about life in the Tenth Country.

*'yes everything here is not that simple though at first glance  
it seems to be a chest of drawers- and that's all! But then  
you roam and roam (he climbs up somewhere) no, not here  
all the routes become entangled.'*<sup>172</sup>

The inability to become fixed is part of this evolution, time travellers appear roaming the centuries, aeroplanes fall from the sky, strong men seem to bend the whole work into a hoop, connecting beginning and end. This chaos tempers any revolutionary fervour that the work may contain

The strongest impression that the work makes is an awareness of the inevitability of this change. It will happen, even though we may not understand how or why. No rest is possible,

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<sup>169</sup> Pg117 VOTS, TDR

<sup>170</sup> Pg118 VOTS, TDR

<sup>171</sup> Pg119 VOTS, TDR This is a speech given by 'The Elocutionist'.

<sup>172</sup> Pg120 VOTS, TDR

yet once the curtain has been rent, and perception adjusted, it is just possible to navigate this confusing new world.

The Opera ends with the sound of an aeroplane falling out of the sky. The crash happens offstage. It seems a disaster, but then the pilot bounces onto the stage completely unfazed, laughing. He sings a zaum song and then the Strongmen of the Future reappear. In an echo of their first entrance they state,

*'everything is good that  
has a good beginning  
and doesn't have an end  
the world will die but for us there is no end!'*<sup>173</sup>

The curtain falls.

#### *Fragmentation and Reordering*

The manner in which the stage was lit was as revolutionary as the costume and set design. Full advantage was taken of the theatre's new electrical lighting system. Light became disconnected; shades and spots glowing with the auto-illumination of the inner space of the Icon. Malevich matched colours and shapes in backdrop and costume, so that through employing different filters colour forms would appear or recede. In this manner the actors would seem to melt into the scenery. The use of light was particularly marked in the second act. As the Sun's unifying light was confined now the stage was thrown into lucent chaos. Different coloured spots roved and circled appearing and fading.

The world depicted became one of fragments; the figures were 'cut up' deprived of hands and heads. The set became movements of geometry. All were, as one observer recalled,

*'subject not only to disintegration into their component  
parts but also to total dissolution in painting space.'*<sup>174</sup>

Light here behaves as a Zaum element. Claims to offer a total illumination, a total disclosure of understanding are abandoned and a confusing array of multiple lights, and perceptual illusions is revealed. The 'New World' of the Tenth country, is new in this way, in that it

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<sup>173</sup> Pg124 VOTS, TDR

<sup>174</sup> Pg164 Livshits, Benedikt. (trans by Bowl. E). *The One and a Half Eyed Archer*. Oriental Research Partners, Newtonville 1977.

becomes impossible to view old objects in the same way, even though at moments they seem recognisable.

*'yes yes, very likely yesterday there was a telegraph pole  
here, but today it is a snack bar, and tomorrow it will be  
bricks I presume, that happens here everyday nobody knows  
where the bus stop is... (he leaves through an upper  
window).'*<sup>175</sup>

Like the fixed forms within the opera the chamber of the stage loses its ability to contain and hold, everything collapsing back before the viewer onto a single plane. The cube design transforms into the birth of the icon of Suprematism the black square.

*A Black Square on a White Ground.*

The painting itself might be seen to be nothing, an un-giving formal arrangement that could hardly be simpler, an empty stage for the desires and interests of any viewer to be played out upon.

Regarded as such the Black Square ceases to be a specific painting, and instead becomes a generic embodiment of the entire form, meaningless save for the theoretical manoeuvrings it allows to occur. It does not embarrass with awkward specifics that might puncture the expansions of theory.<sup>176</sup> However the Black Square continues to exist as an object that belies such emptiness. It asserts a presence that complicates and confuses. It reveals its' own history aside from the claims of others.

If the surface of the painting is examined carefully, it immediately begins to disrupt the web of meaning that has been constructed around it. The cracking surface of the 1915 work

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<sup>175</sup> Pg121 *VOTS*, TDR

<sup>176</sup> Malevich's *Black Square* has become a key presence in the narratives of contemporary art. To some it is a totem, the symbol of a crucial move from representation into abstraction. To others it shows the artist's assumption of the role of auto-theorist or active socio-political agent. To others it is a mystical encounter with the absolute. These accounts are richly served by Malevich's own writings which provide an array of statements and opinions (often seemingly contradictory). The historical circumstances of the creation of the work are significant. The turmoil of Revolution and war in Russia meant that for a long period much of the documentary evidence that might provide further context for the period was lost or inaccessible. Official repression and deliberate obfuscation by those persecuted lead to huge distortions in records. Basic facts such as the dating of works have only recently begun to be brought into any agreed sequence. This combined with the artist's own historical agenda has created a field peculiarly suited to interpretation. The Black Square is an object about which there exist some very precise claims which are backed by a limited amount of vague information. The same quotations and photographs repeatedly cited. This finite matter only partially describes an event considered as hugely significant and leaves an emptiness to be filled.

reveals traces of other forms and colours beneath the surface. Photographic negatives of the work clearly reveal that the square was painted over the top of another, more complex, Suprematist composition. This then was not the *primum mobile* of Suprematism in practice, although it came to be so in theory. If the canvas is approached and turned over the viewer will find the date 1913 inscribed on the back, inseparable from the painting. This was not the date the work was painted although Malevich constantly asserted it as the point of inception.<sup>177</sup> All evidence indicates that the painting 'Quadrilateral', which became known as the Black Square, was not created until early 1915.<sup>178</sup>

Who will see the back of the canvas? If this is a message then it is hidden from most observers. These dates occupy a space between instruction and information. A gift for future historians, a pre-emptive claim directed towards posterity.<sup>179</sup> It must also be remembered that Malevich claimed to have separated himself from causality through the practice of Zaum. From this point onwards he considered himself as operating in a different kind of time, perceiving a different dimension. For external observers the Suprematist landscape has proved as confusing as the House of the Future is in the Victory Over the Sun. However this landscape does have a form, articulated through a systematic practice and pre-eminently concerned with revealing the position of an individual within the universe, the artist within her or his own constructed space, the figure in front of the picture plane.

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<sup>177</sup> For example in 1928 he wrote unequivocally "...in the year 1913, in my desperate attempt to free art from the ballast of objectivity, I took refuge in the square form and exhibited a picture which consisted of nothing more than a black square on a white field." Pg 68 Malevich, Kasimir. *The Non-Objective World*. Paul Theobald & Co, Chicago, 1959.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Malevich's letters to Matiushin in May 1915 indicate that at this moment he was focussed on the Black Square. See Pg 64 Douglas, Charlotte. *Swans of Other Worlds, Kazimir Malevich and the Origins of Abstraction in Russia*. UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1980. The discrepancy between these two dates was not caused by unreliable memory. It was a fiction systematically manufactured and broadcast by the artist. To this day this deliberate confusion of dates has been problematic for those seeking to catalogue Malevich's work. Perhaps it is something of a triumph of Malevich's method that the Guggenheim Museum had to state of its catalogue "But while the sequence of works in this publication reflects certain assumptions about chronology, it is not absolute in this regard: certain works have been grouped together as much according to formal relationships as to their dates". The recalibration of time from a series of causal links into a plane of 'formal relationships' lay at the heart of Malevich's thinking. See Pg29 Drutt, M, *Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism* in Drutt, M (ed) *Suprematism*. Guggenheim museum, New York, 2003.

<sup>179</sup> The desire to be seen as a unique originator is certainly a factor. Malevich was certainly not without artistic vanity and this was intensified through intense rivalry with Tatlin. One contemporary recalls Malevich viewing Tatlin's work '*He said that Tatlin's horizons were blocked by iron.*' Recollection of argument between Malevich and Tatlin. She also remarks that Malevich was 'completely intolerant of other peoples works' *Diaries of Sofia Dymshits-Tolstaya* Pg414 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). *Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum*, Palace, S.I, 2002. Tatlin and Malevich's rivalry seems also to have been fuelled by a deeper mutual recognition. Throughout their lives both kept track of the work of the other. By the time of the "0,10" exhibition this schism had risen to the pitch of a physical confrontation.

# VI

## The Horizon

*Behind the Surface*

*The Black Square in the Corner. The special nature of the Orthodox Icon. Beyond the Divine.  
Painting turned around. Suprematist organisation, the orbits of art, and the dating of  
Malevich's works. Malevich attempts to arrive at the surface.*

*'Not all works made with paints should be confused with painting' K. Malevich<sup>180</sup>*

The practice of Suprematism was designed as a transforming methodology, which could be pursued through any media.<sup>181</sup> However it is through painting that the theory found its most complete expression. Broadly it might be described as an historical explanation of how different visual techniques had been deployed to shape thought, and how to construct the most efficient apparatus for catalysing the next evolutionary perceptual step.

A close examination of the key Suprematist artefact, the painting(s) 'Black Square on a White Background' allows an insight into how this theory grew from very specific visual practices. Through considering the curious and particular emphasis that Malevich himself placed on the precise positioning of this object, and his approach to its surface and its reverse it is possible to shape an understanding of the problematic relationship of the artists diverse productions as part of a consistent program.

Firstly the oft noted connection of the Black Square to the orthodox Icon tradition will be revisited, but with specific attention given to its implications for the positioning of the picture plane and the surface of the work. Secondly the canvas will be reversed and the inscriptions found upon it will be considered in the light of what they reveal about Malevich's mapping his own movement through time and space.

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<sup>180</sup> Central State Archives, St Petersburg, Fund 2555 Inv 1 Dossier 647 Sheet 304 Reverse Pg 394 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). *Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum*, Palace, S.I, 2002.

<sup>181</sup> Malevich launched it through painting in 1915. By 1919 he announced he would henceforth be writing and teaching exclusively, in the 20s the theory was applied to architecture, town planning and the applied arts. At the end of the decade Malevich returned to painting, both creating new work and recreating old, all curated into large shows.



### *The Corner*

In December 1915 Malevich contributed a large group of paintings to *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings "0,10"*.<sup>182</sup> This was the first public display of 'Suprematist' painting. The installation of the thirty-nine canvases he exhibited was carefully arranged around the painting listed in the catalogue as 'Quadrilateral', the Black Square. The painting is also given prominence in the list accompanying the exhibition, placed first, without reference to any map of the space. The only surviving photograph of this arrangement shows the Black Square hung high in the room, not flat against the wall, but across the corner. Malevich specifically linked the Black Square to the space generated by the Orthodox Icon.

*'The Icon takes us into an absolutely special world, one which has nothing in common with the world of painting.'*<sup>183</sup>

In his reply to the criticism of the 0, 10 exhibition by Benois, Malevich stated,

*'I have one bare icon of my time, without a frame (like my pocket) and it is hard to fight'.*<sup>184</sup>

This icon was the Black Square. The painting hung high in the corner of the room, angled between the two walls. This positioning was precisely that defined as the *Krasny Ugol* the 'Sweet' or 'Red' Corner the traditional place for an Icon to be displayed in a family home.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings "0,10"* Galerie Dobychina Petrograd, 19/12/1915 to 19/1/1916 Malevich was showing alongside eleven other Avant-Garde artists. Malevich, Tatlin and Puni were responsible for organising this exhibition. For a complete overview of the many accounts of this exhibition see Boersma, Linda, S. *0,10 The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1994.

<sup>183</sup> *Unpublished Manuscript of the icon collector Ilya Ostroukhov* 1913 quoted Pg 39 Betz, Margaret. *The Icon and Russian Modernism*, Art Forum XV Summer 1977. The tradition of the 'red corner' was said to have originated from one particular icon- *'The Saviour not made by human hands'*. This legendary icon was said to have been created at the request of Agbar IV, (also called Agbar the Black). He heard reports of Jesus preaching and healing, and, being a leper, desired to experience this for himself. He sent his scribe Hannan to ask Jesus to visit his kingdom. When the scribe met Jesus he was told he could not come but would send a disciple. Hannan then asked if he might take a likeness of Jesus to show his king. However when he attempted to paint he could not look on the brightness of Jesus's face and had to give up. Seeing this Jesus took the cloth he was painting on and pressed it against his face, producing an icon. When this was returned to Russia the king looked upon it and was healed. In later years when the city was threatened the bishop ordered the icon to be walled up in a dark corner, lit only by a small candle. This dark arrangement was replicated in every 'sweet corner' the traditional site for an Icon's display in the home. The artefact of the icon is an actual impression, a direct transfer of power. It does not need to be illuminated by daylight, but continues to emanate its transforming energy even in the dark.

<sup>184</sup> Letter to Benois quoted Pg 392 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I, 2002. The respected critic Benois, a supporter of symbolism and earlier new trends found this exhibition a step too far and accused those involved of a destructive boorishness that would destroy art. In his reply Malevich asserted that this idea of art deserved to be destroyed and rigorously defended the new art as a creative force.

The painting is 'without a frame'<sup>186</sup> it has no device to separate it from the world around. In this sense it is like a pocket, a space both separate yet also defined, contained and connected to the garment around it.

Later Malevich wrote of this arrangement *'The corner symbolizes that there is no other path to perfection except the path into the corner, this is the final point of movement.'*<sup>187</sup> The Black Square bisects these two converging or receding planes, it sits in its' own position creating a bisecting plane uniquely its own, an interruption. This is also a model of how a human might make sense of their position amongst multiple dimensions, a bisecting plane, a skin of reality.

The board of the Icon does not reflect, nor represent, it reveals.<sup>188</sup> The viewer enters into an intimate relationship with the work. It is positioned high in the corner away from light. The viewer who takes a position in front of the sweet corner will experience a momentary eclipse of the mundane.

An understanding of the manner in which icons were expected to function is crucial to an understanding of Suprematism. The description of the essential qualities of the icon could easily be adapted to describe the working of a Suprematist element.

*'This art is intended not to reflect the problems of life but to answer them, and thus, from its very inception, is a vehicle of the gospel teaching. The main outline of the art of the church is already beginning to be formed here. Illusory three-dimensional space is replaced by the plane of reality;*

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<sup>185</sup> The south eastern corner of the room. The Icon is briefly illuminated with red light as it is facing the early morning sun. For the rest of the time it is illuminated only by a candle Pg69 Kotkavaara Kari *Progeny of the Icon*, Abo Akademi University Press, Abo. 1999. To viewers of the 0,10 exhibition the Icon was familiar through its crucial place within the Orthodox Christian practice, and because over the previous decade there had been a huge revival of interest in the icon as an indigenous cultural tradition within the context of the art gallery rather than the Church.

<sup>186</sup> Letter to Benois quoted Pg 392 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I, 2002.

<sup>187</sup> Appendix to Non Objectivity 1924 Reflections on the death of Lenin whose 'face' Malevich describes as functioning like a holy icon. Quoted Pg 69 Boersma, Linda, S. 0,10 *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1994.

<sup>188</sup> In Russian the nomenclature of the elements of Icon painting is in many cases different from that of painting in general, emphasising the special nature of the task undertaken. This gives particular meanings to certain terms; for example Khlebnikov described the blackboards of mathematical calculations he created as 'Doska', which translates as board, but also has the specific meaning of the board on which an icon is painted.

*the connection between figures and objects becomes conventionally symbolical. The image is reduced to a minimum of detail and a maximum of expressiveness.*<sup>189</sup>

### *Iconspace*

In the Orthodox Church the concept of 'economia' describes the correct handling of the enactment of things within their own characteristics. Malevich's employment of the term 'economy', which has proved difficult for many analysts of his writings, has its roots in this Orthodox usage.<sup>190</sup> The qualities expected of an icon painter might also be seen as a template for Malevich's view of the role of the artist in society. The construction of the icon was not an act of representation but of deep feeling, of prayer and instruction. The artist's entire life was an immersion into the formal qualities of the icon, object and idea merged,

*'The artist lived and thought in images and reduced forms to a limit of simplicity, the depth of whose content is visible only to the spiritual eye.'*<sup>191</sup>

The icon reveals the possibility of knowing divinity. The practice of its construction attempts to realise this possibility. It is also a continuing process by which the artist fashions an internal icon. Ultimately no individual icon contains divinity, but all contain the possibility of the divine. The actual object of the work becomes a site that defies containment. Rather than a representation, the work of the painter is to clear away and purify. The image pushes through from outside the world. This is emphasised by the specialized language used to describe icons. All positions are orientated around the perspective of the figure within the work looking out onto the world (in the same manner as stage directions). The artist attempts to briefly occupy this internal position.

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<sup>189</sup> Pg29 Lossky Vladimir and Uspensky Leonid, (Trans by Palmer, G and Kadloubovsky, E) *The Meaning of Icons* Boston Books, Boston. 1952.

<sup>190</sup> So, for example, the 'economy' of Christ is not purely in the power of 'God the Father'. The 'body' of the icon exists in the Orthodox church on a level with scripture and the cross. This position was clearly defined by the VIIth Oecumenial council (787) and communicated precisely in the '*Kontakion of the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy*'. Here the use of the icon is defended against the sustained criticisms of iconoclasts. Rather than a deceiving image the icon is considered as indicating the possibility of the bodily incarnation of the divine. The Holy Fathers argue Christ was born of a human mother yet still contains his divinity so it is also possible that an icon can intimate the embodiment of this divinity. To deny the icon is to deny Christ and to attack Mary.

For an account of the interpretation of Malevich's use of this term see note 65 Pg168 Tupetsin, Margarita. *Malevich and Film*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002.

<sup>191</sup> Pg32 *ibid*. Frequently these artists would be Sainted themselves, for example in the fifteenth century Andrew Rublev was named St Andrew.

The picture plane of the icon differs from that of a conventional painting, a difference that is signalled by its construction.<sup>192</sup> The point of contact with the outside is emphasised rather than minimised. The plane of the work is recessed into the board and so is continuous with its own frame and the hence the world. The image often overlaps the border of the frame, breaking out of the picture plane. The white ground of the Black Square presents a similar entangled frame. The suggestion is not that the Icon blends into the world, but rather that the world itself is a construction that conjoins the space of the icon. The figure in the icon looks onto the picture of the world.

### *Dark Light*

There is no impression of external light within the Orthodox icon. Nature is excluded in the search for an internal source of illumination. Here light may in fact become darkness, a black sun. The Black Square of 1915 shares a particular quality of darkness with icons. The square is formed from a thin coating of paint that lays over another image. Below the square a more complex Suprematist painting lies, visible now through cracks and uneven reflections. Many icons were also obscured beneath layers of darkened varnish, the resin of the protective *olipha* discoloured by age and smoke. They continue to function beyond the connection of sight.<sup>193</sup>

Kruchenykh joked that Malevich's works were created in total darkness.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Pg36-39 Uspensky, Boris *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon* Peter De Ridder Press, Lisse 1976 Notes on the Preparation of a surface for an Icon; Select a wooden panel, non resinous (lime alder birch, cypress) This must be totally dry and without knots, and carefully planed. Insert but do not fix two hardwood batons on the reverse to guard against future warping. On the front plane create a recessed space. The natural frame around the edge allows for the work to be created without being touched. The impression of an illusory space is hindered by this frame. Finely score the surface of the recessed space to allow a better adhesion of the ground. Size the space and allow to dry then apply a piece of loosely woven linen. This provides a mesh to support the ground. A ground (levkas) of alabaster and the finest grade chalk is then applied, with between three and eight coats- a hard, smooth mat white surface is formed. A drawing is sketched onto this surface with a pencil or brush, and then scored into it with a needle like stylus. This provides a guide but may also be deviated from. Large areas of gold are then applied. Create a tempera solution using egg yolk, water and vinegar as a preservative. This is the vehicle for the pigments. Earth pigments form the basis of the palette. After drying the icon is covered with *olipha* (boiled linseed oil) mixed with resin. This protects and unifies the surface of the icon. The icon painter is involved in all stages of this production. The materials represent the fullest participation of the 'visible world' in the creation of the work. The pigments used are specifically proscribed, each colour an essence, an intense quality of the earth.

<sup>193</sup> It is significant that the first exhibition of cleaned icons took place in St Petersburg in 1913, whereas they had previously been displayed beneath a coating of darkness.

<sup>194</sup> 'Malevich was terrified of having anyone find out what his new works were like. He talked a lot about them, but refused to show his new works. Kruchenykh then made a joke that Malevich and Morganov were so afraid of openness, so afraid that their inventive secrets might be recognised and stolen, that they painted in total darkness. As a matter of fact the blinds were drawn.'

Pg 24 Jakobson, Roman (trans by Stephen Rudy). *My Futurist Years*, Marsilio, New York, 1997.

Roman Jakobson describes visiting Malevich in his flat in 1914, whilst the painter was working on the paintings that would launch Suprematism at the 0,10 exhibition. The atmosphere was paranoid; the blinds of the studio were drawn to prevent passers by from seeing even a glimpse of the work.

*'Painting arose from mixed colours, turning colour into a chaotic mixture... I have found that the nearer one is to the culture of painting the more the frameworks of things lose their system and break up, setting up another order according to the laws of painting.'*<sup>195</sup>

The dark light is a combination, *fuscum sub negrum*, the chaotic mixture of a primal chaos, the first state of unformed void, before light. The painting contains every colour and so becomes full and dark, beyond perspective and relationship. Every possibility present, everything seen at once. This dark light is the result of the intermixture of millions of individual particles of pigment, each a multi-faceted pulverised diamond prism.

The second Suprematist element the black circle is spun from the black square, a dark circle like the black sun of the eclipse. The moment of eclipse is a dissolution of the order achieved through pattern. It seems to defy the foundation of causation, the rhythm of the Sun's orbit. Time and light collapse. External perception is robbed of all its reference points.

### *Beyond the Divine*

Malevich made a clear separation between the manner in which an icon functioned, and the accretions of authority that had come to surround it.<sup>196</sup> The face was not that of a God, but that of an ordinary person. As with an icon the task was to go beyond the face, to penetrate the surface, and enter into the possibility offered by the structure itself. In his teaching diagrams he directly linked an attack on the institutions of art with that on the church, both had divided painting from its true function, both needed to be abandoned.

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<sup>195</sup> Malevich, Kazimir. *Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism*, Moscow, 1919. Pg120 in Malevich, Kazimir. Anderson, Troels (ed). *Essays on Art 1915-1933, Vol 1*. Rapp & Whiting, London 1968

<sup>196</sup>In an autobiographical fragment Malevich specifically recalled icons seen in his childhood. *'There were painted icons... which must have influenced me, for they portray people in colour. But it seems that this was so overshadowed by extraneous attitudes towards icons that it did not even occur to anyone to see the faces of ordinary people in these images, or that colour was the means of depicting them'* Autobiographical notes Pg169 D'Andrea, Jeanne (ed), *Kazimir Malevich 1878-1935*, Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1990. In simple terms of composition and colouring such influences can be clearly discerned throughout Malevich's career. For an exhaustive exploration and illustration of these comparisons see Cortenova, Giorgio (ed). *Kazimir Malevich e le sacre icone russe : avanguardia e tradizione*. Electa, Milan, 2000.

*'The meaning of every organism in utilitarian technology  
has the same aim and intention and in seeking the  
opportunity to penetrate the realm we see on the  
Suprematist canvas'.<sup>197</sup>*

Malevich presents an image of a universe composed without form; nothing exists or can be comprehended save as movement within this completeness, which reveals the totality of the viewer's immersion. This is either something or nothing, it does not matter. In contrast is God, a non-thinking state, an eternal rest, who as such cannot know or seek to know what occurs in the created universe.

*'any proof is simply the appearance of the  
indemonstrable'.<sup>198</sup>*

Man is the opposite of God; he *'cannot bear rest... for it signifies non-existence'.<sup>199</sup>* Thus although his efforts are expended in the search for 'perfection' in technology or God, man cannot accept the implications of the success of this search *'the crazy brain'* of the universe, the *'senselessness of God liberated and concealing himself in rest'.<sup>200</sup>*

#### *The Black Square is not an Abstract Painting*

It is an artefact, it is beyond the control of the thought of the artist. It is an apparatus, which disrupts and refigures singular rationality. It is there, here, now and also then. A functional example.

Rather than an 'abstract' object, a construction whose existence is most present in the mental realm, it may be more useful to consider this work as concrete and present. The complexity

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<sup>197</sup> Pg124 Malevich, Kasimir. (trans by Glowacki-Prus,X & McMillin,A) *Anderson, Troels (ed) Essays on Art 1915-1933, Vol 1*. Rapp & Whiting, London 1968. Here 'organism' refers to cultural constructions, following from Matiushin's use of the word in his 1913 interpretation/translation of 'Du Cubisme' *'A painting carries within itself its raison d'être... Essentially independent, necessarily complete, it need not immediately satisfy the mind, on the contrary it should lead it little by little, toward imaginative depths where burns the primary light. It does not harmonise with that or another ensemble, but harmonises with the totality of things, with the universe. It is an Organism'*<sup>197</sup> Matiushin *Du Cubisme* Pg 371 Dalrymple Henderson, Linda. *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1983. There is a complete transcription of Matiushin's article.

<sup>198</sup> *ibid* Pg223

<sup>199</sup> *ibid* Pg214

<sup>200</sup> Pg214 Dalrymple Henderson, Linda. *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1983.

and potency of the work emerged through the attempt to manufacture it. This echoes the task of the icon painter '*to join light with darkness*'.<sup>201</sup>

The Black Square becomes the apparatus through which thought and perception can be brought into a more complete relationship.<sup>202</sup> The desired escape is an escape from the trap of thought patterns that fix humanity into a linear mortality.<sup>203</sup> The square enables this escape from the '*torture chamber*'<sup>204</sup> of a perception fixed in the past, held down to the ground.

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<sup>201</sup> *An Icon Painters notebook; The Bolshakov edition* Moscow, 1903, (Russian).

Translated and ed Gregory Melnick, Oakwood Publications, Torrance 1995

<sup>202</sup> A key moment in Malevich's teaching was the point at which the student decided to attempt their own Black Square.

<sup>203</sup> The poet Khlebnikov and Malevich shared this vision. In the poem '*Let the Ploughman leave his Furrow*'. Khlebnikov described human perceptions as like being the inside of a grey wave.

*'... there is lots of dust,  
Pattern the dust into circles, curves  
Like the grey insides of a wave,  
And let some schoolboy say; that dust  
Is Moscow...  
And let a bride, who would not want to see  
Mourning bands beneath her fingernails  
Scrape the dust from beneath them and murmur:  
Here in this dust burn living suns  
And worlds no mind dare comprehend.'*

Velimir Khlebnikov Pg 55 Khlebnikov, Velimir (trans by Schmidt, P). *The King of Time*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985

<sup>204</sup> Pg39 *ibid*

### *Painting Turned Around*

Malevich produced four Black Square paintings (1915, 1923, 1929, 1930).<sup>205</sup> On the reverse of each of these versions is the date 1913. The Black square was a multiple event, or perhaps it would be more accurate to describe each manifestation of the work as a cross section of a loop in time becoming visible at multiple points. Each location of the Black Square is also the location of Malevich a re-assertion of his relationship to this painting and to painting in general; a description of the 'movements' of thought he himself developed to describe this relationship.<sup>206</sup> The disarrangement of time, the constant historical readjustment is also a symptom of the need to create an ordered progression in life and thought. The teaching diagrams, which Malevich prepared for his visit to the Bauhaus, present this process graphically.<sup>207</sup> The Suprematist theory is concerned with registering and understanding movement within the rigid expressions of structures of the minds of self and others.

Malevich was thirty-seven years old when he painted the Black square. He had been working in a variety of styles since the beginning of the century, shifting from a symbolist/impressionism to 'cubo-futurism' the alogical style devised as a 'Zaum of painting'.<sup>208</sup> He did not have an easy relationship with his own work. The anxiety is palpable; mood swings from arrogant self-assertion to complete reinvention. His character was contradictory, both desiring a complete immersion in each work, but also divorced from it by awareness and reflection. Malevich described his emotional response to the first Black Square, "*I was gripped by a kind of timidity bordering on fear*".<sup>209</sup> He recounted how he

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<sup>205</sup> The Black Squares of 1915 & 1929 are in the Tretyakov gallery, 1923 in the State Russian Museum, and that of 1930 in the Hermitage.

<sup>206</sup> The Square also appeared as a kind of signature on other works (For example in the corner of the 1933 self portrait, on the back of the painting is written '*The Artist and the Black Square*'). His pupils were encouraged to produce versions of the work at key moments of their studies, and wore it as a badge on the sleeves as members of 'UNOVIS (Affirmation of the New Art) the name given to Art collective formed by Malevich at Vitebsk. The painting hung above Malevich's deathbed, on the radiator of the truck that was his hearse, and a white block with a black square recessed into it formed his tombstone.

<sup>207</sup> The teaching boards were designed at UNOVIS and displayed during Malevich's visit to Germany in 1927. These boards carefully arrange visual and textual material to demonstrate the movement through different stages of artistic production linked with wider culture and form. They display the theoretical arguments that Malevich had produced and taught over the previous twelve years describing the shift from Impressionism, Cezannism, Cubism and Futurism and the emergence of 'Non-Objectivity, the 'New Element' in painting These boards were prepared by Malevich, Yermalova, Yudin, Rozhdestvensky. See Pgs 37-44 *Malevich Teaching Diagrams* in *Art & Design* Vol 5 no5/6 1989 and Pg206-244

<sup>208</sup> In 1920 a one reviewer wrote '*there is no such "artist Malevich" at all; there are several persons whose name is Kazimir Malevich who produce paintings... but these several Maleviches are unable to constitute one complete Malevich... Only the latest version of Malevich deserves our attention-Malevich the Suprematist. Here he is original at least in terms of theory.*' A.Efros Review of Malevich Retrospective Exhibition, Khudohestvennaia Zhizn (No3 1920), Pg256 Drutt, M (ed) Suprematism. Guggenheim museum, New York, 2003.

<sup>209</sup> Pg68 Malevich, Kasimir. *The Non-Objective World*. (1928) Paul Theobald & Co, Chicago, 1959.



could not eat or sleep. As a revelatory event the work brings both order and disorder. The rearrangement it demands distort and displace previous certainty.<sup>210</sup> The Black square becomes the full stop to all that has come before. Some saw it as an act of violence 'Murdering art and laying its corpse in a coffin sealed with the Black Square'.<sup>211</sup> This is an attempt at self-murder, a murder of Malevich's past works, his earnest engagement with the 'isms' of European art. However Futurist bombast cannot explain the continuing impact of the work, Malevich found it as hard to destroy himself as others would do.

The square also obliterates what is beneath its own surface, the identifiable connection with a history of technique. The painter is rendered as much a witness as any other viewer. The violent severance in the construction of the Black Square can be seen as a point of compression, an extreme simplification of all experience into a fundamental form. The surface of the painting does not connect with the viewer through presenting a comforting illusion; the possibilities of the picture plane are reduced to a single division, black, white, object, ground. This compression is not the endpoint but part of a dynamic loop, part of a continuing pulsation. The painting retains an irreducible complexity, present as its' own surface. In this it makes more present the immanent possibility of creativity a tiny space where change might occur. Malevich identifies this with the point of emergence, of birth, of creation of new life,

*'I have arrived at the surface and can take the dimension of a living body'.*<sup>212</sup>

The viewer's relationship to the Black Square can be understood as one of movement. The 'arrival at the surface' is allowed through the positions the painting encourages the viewer to occupy. The work acts as a dynamic connection between different practices of making and of

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<sup>210</sup> Within the hugely competitive Russian Avant-garde, the moment of revelation became a crucial element of a work. The sudden unveiling of new works accentuated this characteristic. The emergence of the Black Square was the last such gesture in Malevich's work.. The degree of competitiveness amongst the Russian Avant-garde artists was enormous, with a huge emphasis being placed on innovation. 'Moscow artists... are ready to give up everything for the right to be in first place even for an instant... The first one to come up with the new is king! Moreover a couple of good friends can snatch your new ideas from under your nose... even if your new idea won't ultimately succeed you can still get a lot of mileage out of it in the beginning.' Mikhail Matiushin review of 0,10 exhibition 1916. Drutt, M (ed) Suprematism. Guggenheim museum, New York, 2003. This exhibition marked the high point of this competition for innovation, and also its end in some ways. The trends of Suprematist and Constructivist developed from this point with work focussed exploration and consolidation of these approaches rather than their overthrow. The title '*The Last Futurist Exhibition*' seems to have reflected a genuine change in attitude amongst many involved in the new art For an account of the growing feud between Malevich and Tatlin see Boersma, Linda, S. *0,10 The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1994.

<sup>211</sup> Years later Malevich's own coffin was to take exactly this form, its lid decorated with the Suprematist elements. I.V Kluin, *My Path in Art* quoted Pg12 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I, 2002.

<sup>212</sup> Pg40 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I, 2002.

understanding the world. In this it allows for an extension of comprehension into a 'Zaum' space of possible connection. To achieve this it needs to be located beyond the scope of an individual's potency. The work becomes an orbital pathway of approach and retreat.<sup>213</sup>

The Black Square was stripped to the most basic elements. The possibility it offered was an escape from time, even from the time of heaven. In 1916 Malevich wrote to Matiushin proposing they work on a theory to explore these ideas.

*'Space is larger than heaven, more powerful, and our new book is a science about the space of the desert.'*<sup>214</sup>

The four squares (1915, 1923, 1929, 1930) put together form the walls of a close dark chamber, a space of eclipse. The fifth square of 1913 is ever present, unobtainable, non-existent, a multiplying disruptive presence, the promise of the non-object.

#### *Movement across the Chasm*

*'... the Earth does not move forward or backwards but merely completes its own path in its own orbit... Take Rubens in aphelion and Cezanne in perihelion as your yardstick.'*<sup>215</sup>

The patterns of movements are revealed by intersections and interruptions, 'a banishing from consciousness a things wholeness'.<sup>216</sup> Without such interruptions the mind will revolve in 'the midst of a compositional circle'.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> In 1921 Malevich produced the text 'Futurism-Suprematism' In terms which are strikingly reminiscent of the future world depicted in 1913's 'Victory Over the Sun' he states, '...not a single grounded structure will remain on Earth. Nothing will be fastened or tied down. This is the true nature of the universe. But while each unit of matter is a singular part of nature, it will soon merge with the whole. This is what Suprematism means to me- the dawn of an era in which the nucleus will move as a single force of atomized energy and will expand within new, orbiting, spatial systems' *Futurism-Suprematism, 1921* (translated by J.E Bowlit) Pg 177 in D'Andrea, Jeanne (ed), *Kazimir Malevich 1878-1935*, Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1990

<sup>214</sup> Letter to Matiushin quoted Pg251 Simmons, Sherman, *Kasimir Malevich's Black Square and the Genesis of Suprematism 1907-1915*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1981. (Ph.D).

<sup>215</sup> The *aphelion* is the point at which an orbiting object is closest to the Sun, the *perihelion* the furthest. Letter from K. Malevich to Lev Yudin July 1924. Pg394 *Kazimir Malevich in the Russian Museum*.

<sup>216</sup> It is interesting to consider the half teacup Malevich designed in this light. *Teapot And Suprematist Cup and Saucer* UNOVIS 1923 see Pg 386 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). *Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum*, Palace, S.I, 2002.

The perceived everyday is an illusion that must be punctured to gain a vision of the movements of time and space.<sup>218</sup>

A drawing produced between 1917 and 1919 is bordered by extensive notes that precisely describe the movements of the Suprematist elements within it. The drawing is an attempt to create a '*legitimate sphere*' and thereby avoid the '*catastrophe of a linear movement*'. This linear catastrophe recalls Matiushin's disdain for '*coward causality*'. The drawing indicates that this disaster is to be avoided through awareness- the '*increasing tension*' of the expression of '*dynamic and spatial sensation*'.

The note concludes with a sentence that might act as a postscript for all of Malevich's theorising. '*Such an assertion would appear to be intellectual reason, but in reality it originates from a natural action, after which the reasoning and ascertainment of the formula may be deduced.*'<sup>219</sup>

The movement is an orbit through eclipse and revelation, an echo of the rhythm of breath and heartbeat. Consciousness is constructed from this movement, not as life, but as a view of life and the absence of life, the possibility of life. This consciousness is the recognition of the process of movement in time and space, '*a window through which we discover life*'.<sup>220</sup>

*'The blue colour of the sky has been defeated by the  
Suprematist system, has been broken through, and entered  
white as the true real conception of the infinite, and  
therefore liberated from the colour background of the  
sky.'*<sup>221</sup>

Movement within this infinite chasm is dependent on the forms that contain the '*power of statics or apparent dynamic rest*'.<sup>222</sup> These are Suprematist forms, which indicate the

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Malevich, Kazimir. *Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism*. Pg121 *ibid*.

<sup>217</sup> Malevich, Kazimir. *Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism*. Pg121 *ibid*.

<sup>218</sup> This conception of time and space as an arrangement of non linear patterns that the mind can be adapted to recognise can be compared to Khlebnikov's theories of time described in '*The Tables of Destiny*', in which patterns of events reoccur at regular intervals. The individual still controls micro events but must learn to exist within this element as a sailor reads the tides and waves. See Pg 170-187 Khlebnikov, Velimir (trans by Schmidt, P). *The King of Time*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985.

<sup>219</sup> See notes for plate 149 'Suprematist Drawing 1917-1919' Pg219 D'Andrea, Jeanne (ed), *Kazimir Malevich 1878-1935*, Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1990

<sup>220</sup> Malevich, Kazimir. *Suprematism 34 Drawings*. Pg125 *ibid*. At UNOVIS Malevich's system of teaching was to engineer a physical repeat the movement through the recent movements of painting, recreating these atomizations

<sup>221</sup> Malevich, Kazimir. *Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism*. Pg121 *ibid*.

<sup>222</sup> Malevich, Kazimir. *Suprematism 34 Drawings*. Pg123 *ibid*.

possibilities of pathways. In a passage that recalls the frequent aeroplane crashes in 'Victory Over the Sun' Malevich states that these paths are not found

*'by a clumsy machine of totally catastrophic construction,  
but the harmonious introduction of form into natural  
action'.*<sup>223</sup>

The productions of technology are relics of the passage of certain thought loops, dead representation, a comet's trail of debris. To achieve movement this must be recognised. To explain this movement Malevich again turns to the imagery of the orbits of astral bodies.

*'One only has to find the interrelationship between two  
bodies speeding through space; the Earth and the Moon;  
perhaps a new Suprematist satellite can be built between  
them, equipped with all the elements which will move in  
orbit, creating its own new path. Studying the Suprematist  
form in motion we come to the conclusion that the only way  
movement to any planet can be achieved along a straight  
line is by a circular movement of intermediate Suprematist  
satellites which create a straight line of rings from one  
satellite to another.'*<sup>224</sup>

These satellites have mind and life. They are self contained but porous, moving through one another. This movement cannot become apparent through the colours of representation. The 'blue cupola'<sup>225</sup> catches and curves the rays of vision, forming a hemisphere, a bubble that seems solid as the ceiling of the world. It is an illusion. In contrast to this Malevich describes the energies of black and white as the double basis, which 'reveal the forms of action'. Through understanding this, 'real' movement is possible. This movement is a pulsation running through many apparently static planes, through the near simultaneous circles. A flickering made visible in the momentary and monotone space of the eclipse.<sup>226</sup> This is a mental construction, and offers the possibility of innovation.

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<sup>223</sup> Malevich, Kazimir. *Suprematism 34 Drawings*. Pg123 *ibid*.

<sup>224</sup> Malevich, Kazimir. *Suprematism 34 Drawings*. Pg125 *ibid*. Troels Anderson notes that the period of Aerial Suprematism should be considered as a 'fallacy' - a period that Malevich himself considered to be a mistaken interest in the mechanics of flight. Pg 30 Anderson, Troels. *Malevich*- Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. 1970. This is true in his attitude towards particular paintings of 1917-18 which he regarded as becoming illustrative. But it is important not to confuse this with the use of the idea of space and orbit, not related to 'flying machines' but to mental dissolution which continued to inform Malevich's thinking throughout his life.

<sup>225</sup> Malevich, Kazimir. *Suprematism 34 Drawings*. Pg125 *ibid*.

<sup>226</sup> In 1913 Malevich used the title 'Knife grinder/ Principle of Flickering for a Cubo-Futurist painting. The work shows a man rotating a grinding wheel. Pg 56 D'Andrea, Jeanne. *Kazimir Malevich 1878-1935*, Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1990.

*The Back of the Canvas*

On the reverse of Malevich's canvases a large amount of information can be found, dates and commentaries on the work. These dates are sometimes widely inaccurate, and sometimes correct.<sup>227</sup> Occasionally a work will have two completely different dates,

*Female Portrait (actual date c1928)*

*Dated on reverse 1909 (then changed in red ink to) 1919.*

These 'fictional' dates do however acquire a consistency if they are considered as being arrayed around the originary anchor point of Suprematism, 1913. The works then become arrayed in a chronology of theoretical ordering. Time is under the control of the artist, and this systematic ordering is much more important than the 'content' of any individual canvas.

The comments written on these works place them within the 'world of sensation'.

*Two Sisters (actual date 1930?)*

*'Two sisters was painted during Cubism and Cezannism ~~two sensations~~ under the strong feeling of impressionist painting (during work on Cubism) and so as to free myself from impressionism I painted this canvas. K. Malevich 1910 (painted in four hours).'*<sup>228</sup>

*Sportsmen (actual date c1928)*

*1915 Suprematism within the contours of the 'sportsmen' of the year 1915.*

*Suprematism No 6 -Woman with a rake (actual date c1928-32)*

*1915 Suprematism within the contours of a peasant woman.*

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<sup>227</sup> Many sources have widely differing dates on these works, often accepting the earlier date as valid. This confusion is lessening with the greater availability of information in Russia. The pioneer in establishing the correct positioning for these works was Charlotte Douglas in *Malevich's Paintings-some problems of chronology* Pg 306-307 Soviet Union 5, Pt 2, 1978. Also see catalogues in Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). *Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I.*, 2002. And *Kazimir Malevich*, The Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1990.

<sup>228</sup> The style and content of the inscription indicate they were written in the late period, it is highly probable the painting was executed at this time. For an analysis of the technical construction of this painting see Viktorina. M and Lukanova. L 'A study of technique. *Ten Paintings by Malevich in the Tretyakov Gallery*' Pg187-198 *Kazimir Malevich*, The Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1990.

*Red Cavalry (actual date c1928-32)*

*1918 The red cavalry gallops from the capital of the October revolution to defend the Soviet Border.*

*Complex Premonition (Half Figure in a yellow shirt)*

*1928-32 The Composition coalesced out of elements of the sensation of emptiness, of loneliness, of the exitlessness of life. 1913 Kuntsevo.*

Finally the works actual and fictional dates seem to converge.

*Red House*

*1932*

*K. Malevich.*

In this work the house sitting in the landscape might also be regarded as a Suprematist form sitting amongst coloured striations of an individuals attempts to understand their occupation of time and space.

This recreation was a constellation of activities for Malevich, a didactic exercise, an archiving, a re-affirmation of self and ultimately the possibility of an exit.

This series of paintings are characterised by the presence of embedded Suprematist elements emerging, blocks of colour and form gradually growing out from cubist compositions or impressionistic landscape. This process is most clearly apparent in a set of three works depicting a carpenter, which were executed in 1928-29. The dimensions of each work are close, and the composition similar. One features impressionistic brushstrokes, another cubist forms. The third appears about to dissolve into the Suprematist plane. Each contains dynamic elements which if examined allow for a mental evolution to occur.

*'The contents of art embrace various non-objective sensations and through them I keep in complete contact with the world.'*<sup>229</sup>

In 1929 he described to his students at UNOVIS his ideas of the movement through art movements, ideas, which he believed all artists, must understand and act upon.

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<sup>229</sup> 1927 Letter to Moholy-Nagy Pg158 Malevich, Kasimir. (trans by Hoffman, X) *Anderson, Troels (ed) The Artist, Infinity Suprematism. Unpublished Writings 1913-1933, Vol IV.* Borgen, Copenhagen, 1978.

*'I would like to work with you on Impressionism, so that we may pass not only through knowledge, but also through sensation, through feeling. People have spent almost fifty years on this work, but we will do it in a year.'*<sup>230</sup>

Each student worked through the practice/knowledge of the past. Each painting could reveal certain things simply through its construction. The hand would guide the mind in this search. This process was often unconscious,

*'The canvases of almost every artist contain problems that can be developed, only the artist himself does not realise it.'*<sup>231</sup>

It is not an act of repetition, but an execution exercised in the light of a fuller knowledge. The object of the painting becomes an apparatus of this process, leading the mind; it was necessary for these things to be there, for an actual encounter to occur.

*'The charge of K.Ms works disappears when I do not see them. That is the whole point!'*<sup>232</sup>

The cycle of works 1928-1932 is an autobiographical construction. These works clearly reveal the complexity of Malevich's relationship to the painted surface, in part an act of complete egotism, a messianic system for universal transformation, and in part a complete surrender of personality and authorship.<sup>233</sup> The style of a painting is not an individuals alone, but part of an extending network of vision whose complexity allows further development. Suprematism, in denying painting also becomes the ultimate goal of all painting. It is a space for an individual to 'exit' into, to break free of the trap of causation and naturalness. The peculiar quality of Suprematism was that it should present the possibility of this dynamic movement as an escape into *rest*.<sup>234</sup> Rest becomes the goal of life. Suprematist elements

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<sup>230</sup> Note 15th February 1929 Private Archive St Petersburg. Quoted Pg50 Cortenova, Giorgio (ed). *Kazimir Malevich e le sacre icone russe : avanguardia e tradizione*. Electa, Milan, 2000.

<sup>231</sup> Lev Yudin record of comments made by Malevich whilst he was teaching. Pg428 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). *Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum*, Palace, S.I, 2002.

<sup>232</sup> Lev Yudin's Diary 26 May 1935 Pg424 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). *Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum*, Palace, S.I, 2002.

<sup>233</sup> In part this recreation was necessary because various works had been lost or were inaccessible (a large number of Malevich's works remained in Germany after his exhibition, perhaps in readiness for his own flight) There were around 70 paintings in this show. For a list of these works and installation photographs see Berlin 1927 Pg22-30 198 *Kazimir Malevich*, The Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles 1990. Malevich had no chance to retrieve these works and may have believed them to have been irrevocably lost, providing further impetus for the intense work of 1928-32.

<sup>234</sup> For Malevich's extensive exploration of this idea see Sloth- *The Real Truth Of Humanity* Pg73-86 Malevich, Kasimir. (trans by Hoffman, X) Anderson, Troels (ed) *The Artist, Infinity Suprematism. Unpublished Writings 1913-1933, Vol IV*. Borgen, Copenhagen, 1978.

become 'a *spiritually organic means*'<sup>235</sup> to this end. This escape was what each student, each work of art, each human artefact should attempt to achieve.<sup>236</sup>

### *A Complex Premonition*

The late Suprematist works seem to pose the question 'how can a human inhabit both worlds, that of nature and that of Supreme elements?' What will occur beyond the moment of revelation, the hour after, the day after? These paintings contain figures grown from agglomerations of forms, existing on top of layers of colour. In each a horizon becomes a crucial compositional element, its endless curve beneath the sky seems to

The note on the back of the canvas *Complex Premonition* links this landscape with direct sensation,

*'The Composition coalesced out of elements of the sensation of emptiness, of loneliness, of the exitlessness of life'.*

Considered in the light of biographical detail this might seem a very apt description of the artist's position. In 1930 years of harassment came to a head as Malevich was imprisoned for three months and interrogated about his art and teaching.

*'I am being accused of formalism by the staff of the State Institute of the Arts.'*  
*Within the cube of Cell 167, ODPZ (Department of Preliminary Imprisonment Before Trial).*

All this was part of the ongoing assault on 'Formalism', art that was not at the direct service of the proletariat.<sup>237</sup> The AKhRR<sup>238</sup> had been attempting to eradicate Malevich for some time. In 1924 the public display of his works without permission had been banned. In 1926 The Institute of Artistic Culture, which he ran, was closed down, after accusations it was a '*State run monastery*'. Earlier UNOVIS had been forced to leave Vitebsk.

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<sup>235</sup> Pg73-86 *ibid*

<sup>236</sup> This was clearly a concern for students at Vitebsk '*An exit into Suprematism is possible from my present work*' Diaries of Yev Yudin UNOVIS student. Sept 1923 Pg418 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I, 2002.

<sup>237</sup> To say that the new regime was suspicious of the Avant-garde would be something of an understatement. Lenin despised 'Futurism' and thought that those who practised it 'should be flogged'. Throughout the twenties this full scale suppression became more feasible with the creation of bureaucratic 'critical' structures to stifle and harass individuals. By the thirties even the most committed Constructivists, once considered in the service of the revolution were isolated and ignored. See Pg118-129 Cullerne Brown, Matthew . *Art Under Stalin*. Phaidon, Oxford, 1991.

<sup>238</sup> Association of Art of Revolutionary Russia.



The attack on Malevich was an attack on indeterminacy, an attack not on what he thought specifically, but on the way in which he thought, the possibilities of such activities, his practice. The means of this attack was definition, systematisation, and alignment towards the correct goal, the realism of social theory. The Black Square had become a symbol of that which could not be put to the service of the state ‘*divorced from reality and the real requirements of the proletarian masses*’.<sup>239</sup> The masses were provided with freedom, a freedom from the troubling expression of ‘*bourgeois anarchist individualists*’.<sup>240</sup>

The attempt to silence Malevich failed.

‘What Cezannism are you talking about? What Cubism are you preaching?.. The AKhRR wanted to destroy me, they said break Malevich and you break Formalism. But they didn’t succeed. I survived. You can’t destroy Malevich that easily.’<sup>241</sup>

In many ways Malevich and his works had become isolated. This was a sharp contrast to his reception in Berlin and Poland where he had been lauded and his work celebrated. Malevich had been keen to extend his stay, but also knew that any suggestion of emigration could be seen as ‘counter-revolutionary’ and have disastrous repercussions for himself and those around him.

The *Complex Premonition* is given a precise date and location *Kuntsevo 1913*, the same year as the emergence of the Black Square.<sup>242</sup> The figure in *the painting* is wearing a yellow shirt. This garment had been the identifying eccentricity of the poet Mayakovsky ‘*the cloud in trousers*’, whom Malevich had known well during the futurist years. In 1930 Mayakovsky alienated by criticism and after his request for foreign travel had been refused, killed himself.

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<sup>239</sup> Beskin, *Formalism in Painting* Iskusstvo 1933. Pg 263 Drutt, M (ed) *Suprematism*. Guggenheim museum, New York, 2003.

<sup>240</sup> In 1905 when writing about Party discipline Lenin had argued that this was the definition of free culture and a free press.. V.I Lenin Party Organisation and Party Literature quoted Pg 25 in Cullerne Brown, Matthew . *Art Under Stalin*. Phaidon, Oxford, 1991.

<sup>241</sup> Diary of Pavel Filonov Pg429 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I, 2002.

<sup>242</sup> One other painting shares this location. *Through Station (Kuntsevo)* a Cubo-Futurist work actually painted in 1913, and relating to the railway stop passed through on the journey into Moscow. This seems to refer to a particularly happy time in Malevich’s life when he and his wife were lent a house in the suburbs.

Malevich commented in a letter '*I have no strength left here either, but no wish to follow Mayakovsky's example*'.<sup>243</sup>

Was this painting a *premonition* of the despair of the future? In the inscription on its' reverse the 'exitlessness' described relates directly to the 'exit' into Suprematism. Is the figure then unable to manufacture this escape? Maybe it is a premonition of the possibility of escape that Suprematism offered. Its complexity is that it contains hope and hopelessness, the desire for both change and rest. The painting combines affective Suprematist imagery with a text that anchors it to a particular moment. The only way for these elements to exist simultaneously is through the invention of a dynamic system of regard and analysis, describing individual orbits within larger constellations, providing moments of fluid reference.

The block form that stands above the striations of the landscape suggests both a house and the square planes of Suprematism. This painting seems to show the precise place that the artist described in a letter from Berlin in 1927.

*'Non-Objective art stands without windows and doors, like a pure sensation, in which life, like a homeless tramp, desires to spend the night, an opening of apertures is required. Life is a hermit crab clambering into a shell, concealing its hideous body with a mother of pearl shell.'*<sup>244</sup>

### *The Homeless Tramp*<sup>245</sup>

The tramp constantly searches for the basic frame of existence. There is compulsion about the walking of the tramp a restlessness grown from the demands of survival. Any stopping place is dependent on the permission of others. The through train at Kuntsevo does not rest at the platform. The individual is at the mercy of powers beyond their control, internal and external forces. They are pushed and pulled

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<sup>243</sup> Quoted Pg 28 Cortenova, Giorgio (ed). Kazimir Malevich e le sacre icone russe : avanguardia e tradizione. Electa, Milan, 2000.

<sup>244</sup> Letter to Rozhdestvensky Pg395 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I, 2002.

<sup>245</sup> In fact Malevich proposed to actually walk across Europe. '*As a last resort, if Glavnauka will find it impossible to issue funds for the organisation of the exhibition or the trips of the individual heads of departments. I, as Head of the Department of Painterly Culture (Formal-Theoretical), would like to petition Glavnauka to aid me in receiving visas and credentials to facilitate my journey to France through Warsaw and Germany on foot, which I propose to begin on May 15, and reach Paris on November 1 planning to return by train on December 1. Director of the Institute (K. Malevich). December 9<sup>th</sup> 1925*'. Part of a proposal to Glavnauka Artistic Department asking for backing to organise exhibition of advances in Russian aesthetics posit the scientific-artistic question or 2 heads of staff of State Institute of Artistic Culture to travel abroad, or 3 as above. Pg 245 Drutt, M (ed) *Suprematism*. Guggenheim museum, New York, 2003.

through the world by these forces, unable, or unwilling to find any resting place.

The Budetlayn travel from the 'will be' world. They are missionaries into the past space. These 'irrational tramps'<sup>246</sup> are displaced from their home in the coming world; they are dislocated in the present, constantly moving and aware of their task. 'The future escapes us because we are lazy.'<sup>247</sup>

The trajectory of the individual journey creates the connections of a pathway. Characteristics of a landscape emerge, it contains zones of primitivism, and the most modern, it extends from East to West. It is a description of Russia's vast continental plateau and of the time passing through it and the constant presence of the horizon. The landscape is also a timescape made present to the mind through the weaving of these journeys. The sky shifts above, breaks into the waves of the sea. A tiny skin of particles shifts, to find an economy of form, a search for the colour most fitting to self. Is flight possible, was an exit ever made? The Black Square remains present neither approaching nor receding. Face to face. Face pressed tight against the surface.

On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1935 Malevich died in Leningrad. Above his coffin hung a Black Square. This Suprematist funeral was an echo of the early futurist events, a last public defiance. The coffin was an escape into the space of the will-be-may-be, to here now.<sup>248</sup> The system of Suprematism stands beside painting, as Malevich stands beside painting. It is an attempt at transcendence, a going beyond painting, beyond art, 'the highest and ultimate apocalyptic system'<sup>249</sup> which will overturn the whole world. Yet it also completely embedded in painting, in its relationship to forms to which there is a constant return and from which it draws its energy. This movement is what defines Malevich's life, the tiny edge of possibility between exclusion and incomprehension, containment and dissolution.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Roman Jakobson describes a public lecture given by Ivanov in which he describes the Budetlayn as 'irrational tramps' who have 'no refuge anywhere' Jakobson is quoting from a letter he wrote to Kruchenykh describing the lecture. To the audience this statement would bring to mind the great Russian tradition of privileged youth going to live in the countryside- to learn from and to educate the 'people', the peasants<sup>246</sup>. Each journey was a time when a connection with the land could be forged, a return to a spiritual homeland. Through this image Ivanov is both connecting and distancing the Budetlayn from 'the Wanderers' the movement whose scenes of rural 'reality' had been based on such journeys. Once radical the Wanderers had now become the basis of the academy they initially rejected. Pg104 Jakobson, Roman (*trans by Stephen Rudy*). *My Futurist Years*, Marsilio, New York, 1997.

<sup>247</sup> From Notebooks of Khlebnikov Pg 419 Khlebnikov, Velimir, (ed by Douglas, C. Trans by Schmidt, P). *Khlebnikov Collected works Vol I Letters and Theoretical Writings*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

<sup>248</sup> Roman Jakobson also used a coffin to escape his persecutors, pretending to be dead and smuggled over the border.

<sup>249</sup> A.Romm on the UNOVIS exhibition in Vitebsk 1921. Pg257 Drutt, M (ed) *Suprematism*. Guggenheim museum, New York, 2003.

<sup>250</sup> *Dear teacher I thank you! You gave me a whole world I will now walk myself as best I can*

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*You gave me a standard and a scale, But I am destined to say something different I am destined to say my own thing.* 11pm 18th Sept 1935 The diary of Lev Yudin Pg 424 Petrova, Yevgenia (ed). Kazimir Malevich in the State Russian Museum, Palace, S.I, 2002.

# VII

## ON THE SURFACE

*The Merging of Surfaces*

*The Music Lesson as a multiple presence. Dedicated to dark Dealers, Hogarth's Surface. The surface penetrated. The Blossom Chamber.*

The final chapter describes the actual ‘surface’ of a particular work in Lark, revealing the methods of its construction, and its’ functioning as a site of practical research. The chapter concludes with the definition of several processes, descriptions of the movements that produce and define a ‘surface’ as a complex apparatus of thought.

*The Music Lesson 2008*

This ‘surface’ was constructed over several years and crystallised around the title ‘The Music Lesson’. This title was not consciously attached to a defined concept. It emerged as a drifting ribbon of text, which guides the viewer into the work’s interior space. The title occupied the same space as the trompe l’oeil notes, the number 36 on the back/front of Gisbrecht’s painting. An illusory construction floating above an illusory space. A slight shadow is cast on the surface below, an intimation of perspective and orientation.

As they enter the space the viewer is confronted with three paintings. Two large works at right angles to each other on the facing wall, and a canvas sitting on an easel. A small door leads into a further chamber.

*‘The Music Lesson’ (2004).*

The beginning of the work is recorded as this image, the corner of a room. On one of the walls hangs a painting (The title of the painting is also ‘*The Music Lesson*’).

Opposite the painting is a wooden table. A person sitting on the table directly faces the painting in a perfect position to undertake a lengthy scrutiny. If they drew their legs up off the ground they might briefly imagine they are floating in a white void with the painting hanging before them; the stab of cramp, the body asserting its presence, would soon dispel this sense of dislocation. The viewer then needs to get up, to stretch and walk, to restart their circulation. The painting on the wall shows a space similar to the one in which it hangs, rendered simply with areas of raw linen still visible. It may be that the painting is not finished, and the room is in fact a painter’s studio. Or perhaps it is a gallery and the painting is being displayed. Both table and painting might be described as ‘tabula’. This Latin word encompasses a variety of meanings; A flat piece of wood, a panel for painting, a game board, a notice board, a chart of mathematical calculations, a wax tablet or page for writing upon.<sup>251</sup> It is a monument of records, the tombstone. The table and painting present two planes of activity, and two planes of reflection.

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<sup>251</sup> A metaphor for the nature of the mind found in Plato’s *Theaetetus* and developed from Aristotle’s description of the Human Memory in *De Anima* by Thomas Aquinas and further to John Locke’s ‘*Tabula Rasa*’, the unformed mind as a blank page to be written upon.

The table's horizontal plane suggests a place of work, a functional site. Things can be placed here temporarily, suspended at a useful height for upright humanity.<sup>252</sup> A piece of the horizontal has been lifted from the chaos of the ground and become a neutral site, a place for eating, and making. Objects can be placed upon it, isolated from what is around them, but remain accessible. A table exists for other things to occur, a passive apparatus that nevertheless suggests possibility. The table itself is often unseen.

In contrast within the empty room one cannot help but regard the painting. It is an object whose purpose is to be viewed. The painting projects a zone in front of itself. Not an 'aura' of power or mystery so much as a demand for actions; the action of looking, the action of painting, the action of thought. Even the most 'realistic' renditions of the world are immediately recognised as illusions, and celebrated for their power to convince, not for their invisibility.

*The Music Lesson (1665)*<sup>253</sup>

A woman stands at the keyboard, a man beside her. However even this tentative assumption is shaky, we can see neither the keyboard of the spinet, nor the hands of the woman. She may be playing, or she may simply be standing. No more information is available, nor will ever become available. (*No more information will ever be available? This statement surely cannot be sustained? The hope of all investigation, of all scrutiny is that of disclosure, of discovery. Is there another kind of knowledge that can exist without the promise of revelation? Perhaps some fragment of information will turn up. A historical fragment that identifies this or that element, a novel might be inspired by the relationships of the characters, their voices heard. But here, no; no more information is available.*)

The inscription on the lid of the virginal states 'Mvsica letitiae comes medicina dolorvm' (*Music: companion of joy, balm for sorrow*). It is possible to see this functioning as a motto in

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<sup>252</sup>In her discussion of Jackson Pollock (Pg 93-103 'Horizontality' in 'Formless') Rosalind Kraus examines the significance of the vertical and horizontal axis of painting. Pollock's work, created with the canvas laying flat upon the floor, is seen as embracing the qualities of abjection that Bataille discussed in his definition of the 'informe', his affirmation that the 'universe resembles nothing' is unformed, un-defined despite the aims of academics and philosophers. Pg51 *Encyclopedia Acephalica*. Bataille, Georges, Leiris, Michael (eds). *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, Atlas Press. London, 1995. Bois, Yves Alain & Kraus, Rosalind. *Formless- A Users Guide*, Zone Books, New York, 1997.

<sup>253</sup> Jan Vermeer, *The Music Lesson*, c. 1662-1665, Oil on canvas, 74.6 x 64.1 cm, Royal Collection, St. James' Palace, London

the emblematic tradition, a title that injects an ethical content into the scene depicted. However this text is so completely embedded into the image, a reported detail amongst many others, it can operate in this role only with a concerted effort from the viewer. More immediately it suggests an accurate rendering of an actual object. To view the writing on the virginal case it is necessary to approach the surface of the painting, lean in to pick out the words, rendered to suggest distance. If the viewer imagines moving into the actual space of the room depicted, the navigation becomes more difficult than a craning forward of the neck. The entire right hand side of the work is cluttered with objects. A chair suddenly emerges to trip the unwary as they concentrate on not stepping on the viol.

A mirror above the virginal seems at first to be offering more information, a chance to see further into the space, to discover hidden details. In this mirror we can see a reflection of the woman's face turning slightly toward the man beside her. This exchange either seems either one of instruction or seduction.

The painting is silent. If we imagine a halting melody picked out by the pupil it is our own invention, placing a memory image of piano lessons we have heard over what seems to be a representation of a similar situation.

We might imagine that we are reanimating this frozen, captured moment, this still segment of an event that once occurred. This possibility is undermined by the presence of the mirror in which above the turning face of the woman another object is visible. The wooden legs of an artist's easel are clearly visible. The strong pattern of the floor tiles suggests that if the space of the painting were extended into a third dimension this easel would occupy the same spot that the viewer of the painting presently stands in.

The artificiality of the situation is thereby clearly signalled. What the viewer observes is the not a stolen glance of an intimate situation, but a space created by the event of the painting. Not only can we not hear the music, but we might also assume that it was never played. The positioning of the easel indicates that the entire scene has been carefully arranged by the artist, each object a selected property. The figures are posing, holding the same position, whilst the artist carefully records and adapts their posture. The only movement the subtle rhythm of breath and heartbeat. The viewer too feels this rhythm within her or his own chest. In this the painting achieves its own seduction, a curious intimacy between model, painter and viewer, born not from a presentation of a 'reality', but from a consciousness of a shared illusion.

No music lesson is occurring, yet the idea of a music lesson is present in the minds of all. The painting is not the capturing of a segment of a past event, but is itself an event, an ongoing conversation with each viewer.



The painting exploits and also reveals the seductive powers of the image. The viewer is both allowed a voyeuristic glimpse of others' intimacy, and also led to see that this view is manufactured purely to excite this sensation. There is no further story, no continuation of the narrative. This revelation occurs just at the point where it appears possible to penetrate most deeply into the paintings space, the mirror. In seeking to see the face of the woman the viewer is suddenly presented with the easel and all that it implies.

The presence of the second instrument, the bass viol that lies on the floor, suggests the possibility of a duet. The harmonious union of two instruments was seen as symbolic of the possibility of such a union between two people.<sup>254</sup> Here of course this duet is not actually taking place, we are not even sure that the woman is playing, or had any knowledge of music at all. It is a possibility, an appearance, which the viewer can attempt to inhabit by filling its' silence with his or her own experience.

The possibility of the seductive duet could also be an exploration of the possibility of the union between the two arts of painting and music. How can one be contained within the other, is there any possibility of convergence? The auto-reflective quality of the painting seems hard and cold when placed next to the promise that music will be '*companion of joy, balm for sorrow*'. These active affective qualities are at odds with the detached examination of the still space of the painting. Yet the painting offers recognition, a choice whether to accept or deny the promptings of desire.

The painting's expression of music is framed by the total absence of musical qualities; music emerges from the things that the painting is not. The painting's complete silence contrasts with the production of sound, the essential quality of music. The painting's stillness and its' singular plane, contrasts with the movement necessary to play an instrument, and the linear movement of music. The viewer of the painting stands at the same spot as the artist, attempting to perceive and inhabit these seemingly irreconcilable planes simultaneously. *Turning away from this aperture the viewer can now regard the later version of the work in the space.*

#### *'Roof' and 'On the Corner'*

Two equally sized large paintings are arranged across the corner of the room. To the left is the work '*Roof*' (2004). The top section of the canvas is hidden beneath a solid matt black field of paint. The surface of the rest of the painting reveals patches of the linen it is executed upon.

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<sup>254</sup> For a discussion of Vermeer's handling of these themes see Pg 161-2 & 402-405 Liedtke, W. (ed) *Vermeer and the Delft School*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2001.

This is stained and marked by black paint, which appears to have been forced through the mesh of the fabric from the reverse.

The process of pushing through the surface of the canvas was the first action of the research process. Examining and considering this action steered the project into the forms it has taken. A figure is rendered on the surface of the canvas, shaped not from paint but from a wax medium. The shape is transparent, both defined by its substance but also transparent. The figure is a transposition of the figure of the artist taken from a documentary photograph, a record of an earlier live work '*Change Everything, Keep Everything the Same*' (1999).<sup>255</sup> The head of the figure in the painting is obscured by black strip.

The other painting '*On the Corner*' 2004 employs similar techniques to '*Roof*', again the figure of the artist is present. Figures in both paintings clutch a right angle square. This is rendered in oil paint, and is the exact dimension of the actual roofing square visible in the centre of the room.

The blocks of white visible in '*On the Corner*' seem to be a compressed echo of the corner it sits near, with a dark form intruding, which could be seen as the corner of the painting '*Roof*'. The paintings are arranged to interrupt each other. They form a constellation that suggests an orbit through time. They recall the artist's presence at different points, which may lead to, or follow from the work in the centre of the room, '*The Music Lesson*' 2007.

*'The Music lesson' (2007).*

The canvas at the centre of this work is identifiable as that which hung on the wall in the first version of the work in 2004. Elements of the original painting are still visible, and once again they echo the space around them. Additions have been made. In the painting a white table is visible surrounded by a cube rendered in heavy black lines. An entanglement of wires hovers on the edge. Clots of multi-coloured paint seem about to coalesce into form. The painting now seems to record the history of events that have occurred around it. Tidemarks formed by a depositing of a flotsam of images across the surface. What coherence it possesses emerges from its survival, a return to a form of its original context and position.

The actual table has disappeared from the space but it can be glimpsed all around, through the doors of the rooms that are situated to either side, and in other paintings. The painting now

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<sup>255</sup> In this work seven actions were undertaken with a black plastic bucket, in order to attempt to catalyse 'A Universal Reformation'

sits away from the wall, displayed on an easel that allows the viewer to regard all sides of the object, and to see a variety of relationships with the objects ranged around it.

The surface of the work has been pierced with a solid metal roofing square, the measuring tool apparently swung like a scythe to penetrate not just the canvas, but directly through the wood behind as well. This seems some final act of a desperate process of measurement. The readings on the square are at right angles to the surface it has been applied to. As with the table the shape of the square is present in other works nearby, it can be seen as a solid painted form grasped by the waxy impressions of figures in the two large paintings. This might be a further indication of a record of operations, a set of approaches carried out in the site around this originary object.

### *A Music Lesson?*

The abstract immediacy of music has frequently been alluded to as the exemplar of the potential of human expression and thought. For example in discussing Francis Bacon, Giles Deleuze wrote *'Music begins where painting ends'*<sup>256</sup> and approvingly quoted Proust's description of music as containing *'not one scrap of inert matter refractory to the mind'*. Painting can then be assumed to be the vehicle of this 'inert matter' that rebels against the mind's containment. This is a kind of knowledge, a type of learning, the content of the 'lesson'.

The penetrated surface of the canvas is echoed in an image that is pinned to wall in the direct line of sight behind the painting. A copy of an eighteenth century print has been made on to a sheet of cheap newsprint paper. The image, although perfectly visible, has not been carefully positioned; it is skewed out of an alignment with the paper's side. It has been fixed to the wall with a single tack. The impression is that this image is disposable, ephemeral, perhaps an afterthought. It brings to mind a picture that an artist has pulled from some source and pinned to the studio wall to perform some function of reference.

### *Dedicated To The Dealers In Dark Pictures.*

In March 1761 William Hogarth issued a print entitled *'Time Smoking a Picture'*. The image shows the allegorical figure of Time sitting directly before a painting that stands on an easel. He is so close that the smoke from his pipe and that which he puffs from his mouth drifts onto

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<sup>256</sup> Pg54 Deleuze, Giles. (translated by Smith, D) *Francis Bacon, The Logic of Sensation*, Continuum, London 2003 (French 1981). Deleuze argues that music finds its 'consistency' elsewhere than the body, whereas painting returns allows a discovery of the materiality of presence, with a view to escape.

the surface of the painting. Along with his pipe Time holds a scythe, the blade of which has been pushed through the canvas. The wound suggests not a deliberate slash, but rather an accident caused by a casual lack of interest in the object of the painting. Time sits atop a demolished statue, which in contrast, does seem to have undergone a deliberate mutilation, and looks uncomfortably like a dismembered body. Beside the painting stands a large jar clearly labelled 'varnish'.

These items and the terms used in the title identify the image as an attack on the prevalent view of English connoisseurs, that only the work of the 'Old Masters' was to be valued. To further his point Hogarth plants a reference to a recent issue of the *Spectator* in the print. Within the periodical the editor Joseph Addison damns modern art as the produce of 'vanity, avarice and envy', whilst praising Old Masters which have improved with age.<sup>257</sup>

This desire for old works led to a lively trade in artificially aged paintings. Through exposure to smoke and layers of varnish, the patina of age could be mimicked. Hogarth does not condemn this practice as such, but condemns those who might admire it. The genuine patina of time is treated to an equivalent disdain as the work of the forgers. Both are engaged in the process of obscuring and ultimately destroying the painting. To Hogarth the object of the painting is a bulwark against the extinction of death, its clarity and form offering a kind of refuge.

Hogarth questions what the viewer is admiring, the relic, or the qualities supposedly contained within the relic. Beneath the wreckage of the sculpture runs the quotation 'As statues moulder into worth'. This phrase equates the addition of value that could be either monetary or critical 'worth', to a process of decay, of rotting.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> On the frame of the painting the reference Spectator No 83 is visible. In this edition Addison describes a dream of visiting a picture gallery and seeing an old man putting the finishing touches to the paintings of dead masters.

"He ...added such a beautiful Brown to the shades, and mellowness to the colours, that he made every Picture appear more perfect than when it came fresh from the Masters pencil. I could not forbear looking upon the face of this ancient Workman, and immediately by the long lock of hair upon his forehead discovered him to be Time"

<sup>258</sup> The allusion to statuary also contains a further layer of reference, and a further haunting by death. The figure of time is rendered exactly as it had been by on several famous tombs by the sculptor Roubiliac, a lifelong friend of Hogarth. Roubiliac presented tableau in which allegorical figures of death time and fame would appear to be creating and destroying the monument simultaneously. An eternal collapse. In the prime of his life his work had won him fame and regard, but at the point when Hogarth was making this drawing Roubiliac lay mortally ill and penniless, ignored by former patrons. He was to die in 1762 after a long illness. The print both celebrates his friends style and condemns his plight For an extensive discussion of these monument see Bindman, D. *Bribing the Vote of Fame; Eighteenth Century Monuments and the Futility of Commemoration*. Pg93-107 In Fort, A & Kuchler, S. *The Art of Forgetting*, Berg, Oxford 1999.

The fog of time is also a fog of interpretation. The huge pot of varnish, to which the severed hand of the statue points, can be seen as symbolising the process of the accumulation of critical opinion. Each layer, when taken individually, may be seen as thin and colourless, a protective shield to defend and enhance the surface of the painting. Yet as further layers are added a distinct barrier emerges, distorting and discolouring the work. Eventually what the viewer sees is the varnish, the surface of the water beneath which the painting is submerged. Hogarth accentuates this point with the motto,

*'To nature and yourself appeal, nor learn from others what  
to feel'.*

In the comparison of the irresistible force of the passage of time with the deliberate actions of groups of humans Hogarth's print far exceeds the bounds of localised satire and becomes an expression of a tragi-comic philosophy. The marginal nature of this work, originally created as a subscription ticket, reinforces this impression.<sup>259</sup> The print came into the world, as an aside is delivered from the stage. A quick step out of context, out of the grand flow of narrative. A whisper.

*'Time is not a great artist but weakens all he touches'.*<sup>260</sup>

The motto is adapted by Hogarth from Crates. The original reads

*'Time has bent me double; and Time, though I confess he is  
a great artist, weakens all he touches'*

Hogarth's alteration of Crates quotation is telling. Crates characterises time as an artist, Hogarth denies this, and asserts the opposite.

Where is there a place that time does not touch? Hogarth offers no religious alternative, no place of transcendence. To exist is to eventually fall into non-existence.

The only alternative proposed is art. Here then there may be an avenue of escape from the pervasive force of entropy. If this is the case it is a slender hope. The fate of the objects in the print does not encourage optimism. Even the efforts of those most interested in preservation distort into destruction. The scythe does not penetrate the canvas out of malice but indifference.

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<sup>259</sup> The ticket was for subscriptions for Hogarth's proposed print of his painting *Sigismunda*, a painting of intense significance to the artist as an expression of his theories, and one which had met with a hostile critical reaction.

<sup>260</sup> See Paulsen Hogarth's *Graphic Works* 1:242 See also Pg630 Uglow, Jenny. *Hogarth* Faber &Faber, London, 1997.

No varnish can arrest the process of time, nor can any exercise of taste and judgement freeze culture at a moment of climax. The alternative offered in this print, is not the achievement of immortality or the apprehension of some ultimate truth. It is the reoccurrence of the activity of creativity, the constant emergence of the work of the artist. Each fragile production is momentarily a possibility of an alternative existence without dimension.

Within the print the canvas, placed on the easel, supports the surface and sits at a right angle to the line of the scythe.

### *The Blossom Chamber*

As the viewer turns away from this constellation of works they notice another work behind them, occupying a narrow strip of wall. This painting is entitled '*The Blossom Chamber*' (2007). In height it exactly matches '*Roof*' and '*On the Corner*', but it is far narrower, suggesting that it is perhaps a segment of a larger work. This impression is reinforced by a closer examination that reveals pencil lines extending on the wall, as if tracing the dimensions of this larger canvas. These lines reach the edge of the wall and then the viewer can imagine them carrying on through the air, filling the space they have just passed through. Did they then enter through this canvas?

The space depicted in this segment is full and chaotic, grown from several overlayings. There is an architectural structure and a great collection of objects arrayed amidst niches and arches. Clots of flower pinks and greens wind around the intruding branches of a tree that seems to have found unexpected purchase in this place. The tree is further enwrapped with dark cabling perhaps the evidence of some chaotic communication system. Perhaps all would be clear if the rest of the work were visible. Or has the entrance of the viewer, bursting unknowingly through this slight concept, shattered any such possibility completely.

# VIII

## CONCLUSION

*Movements that form the Surface.*

*Loops of approach and retreat. Loops of the immediate past. Loops of attention. Eclipse as vital element within practices discussed. Conversation, the surface as an informal group. The surface as desire. Enough.*

### *What About The End?*

A return to the first image. A figure stands in front of a picture plane. Between them the surface is formed. In this sense the attempt to 'arrive' at the surface appears highly quixotic, as the desired object is brought into being precisely through its unobtainable position. To arrive would then be to be presented with Gisbrecht's double reversal, to be always thwarted. This is to assume that the surface is a passive site, consumed in one gaze, swallowed whole and indigestible. This surface is not static; it is a shifting phenomenon born from a million crystalline reflections. A cloud construction.

Yet the possibility of connection has consistently been celebrated, not only as an intellectual aim, but the attainment of 'life'. Baudelaire wrote of the resurrection of Lazarus, Malevich of an arrival at a '*living body*'. Lyotard wrote of the surface that reveals life, whilst Francis Bacon wished to trap the '*Living Fact*'.

At first this appears contradictory, that vitality should be considered to be located in this apparently most still medium. It is possible through understanding of life as a process of holding and retention. Life must be seized because that which is lost, has ceased to exist. The ultra vivid, vital, surface of the painting plane offers a possibility that some paradoxical union might be effected, the whole self offered to the whole world.

Life then is recognised as a quality differing from existing, as a yearning for completeness made manifest through total connection. But this possibility undoes itself, the viewer constantly arrives at points of further recognition of their own position, of their movement around, towards, away from this plane.

Throughout this project these movements have emerged within a process of loops, ideas of constellation, orbit and eclipse which allow for the expression of a dynamic organisation, that inform both making and receiving the picture plane.

### *Loops Of Approach And Retreat.*

A person might rise from the chair and walk towards the painting, to better examine a detail, or to back away to gain a wider perspective. The painting is the focus, a fixed line anchored to the eyes. The viewer navigates the space within the corona of peripheral vision; a halo of space perceived but unrecognised by consciousness. The viewer's movement is somehow



disconnected from the immediate environment, as if they were making an attempt to enter the projected space of the painting. In backing away from the work, the space of the room might reassert itself. The spectator might trip over or collide with an unseen object, tumble into a void where solidity was expected.<sup>261</sup> Avoiding such interruptions, the viewer shapes a continuum from the series of images gathered by this approach. The painting begins to exist in the mind not as a fixed point but as a multitude of viewings, a cone of sight and time that contains both details and an overall impression. Each new viewing becomes a movement that travels back and forth between this mind painting and the object perceived.

### *Loops Of The Immediate Past.*

If the viewer turns away from the painting before them, turning their back as they retreat from a close examination, a small loop of the preceding impression overlays their current perception. This mirrors the afterimage whose shadow form briefly haunts optic muscles and nerves; a past presence sliding over the surface of the immediate.

This momentary disordering is not an anomaly but a making apparent of the constantly present adjustments of perception and conception to spatial and temporal change. Rather than a constant inrush of information the process of seeing and looking could be described as a pattern of minute pulsations, just previous and present constantly compared. This suggests that the viewer will have difficulty in focussing intently on any one part of the work. The process of seeing involves de-emphasising familiar elements, only allowing for momentary attention to any particular point, carried to memory. If the still object of the painting is to be regarded each part of it must be constantly reinvented. Is this process of reinvention to be seen as coming closer to the 'actual' object of the painting, or a retreat from it into a set of abstractions and memories, triggered by the occlusions of familiarity?

### *Loops of Attention.*

To regard the painting links eye, tongue and mind and the body's movement. The simulation of internal monologue pushes thought into shapes, into the directed flow of language. The positioning of the thinking body on the chair, or standing, or leaning, or turning away also weaves through thought. Duration and finitude are part of this regarding. Awareness of temperature moves through the body, demanding action.

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<sup>261</sup> Humphrey Jennings the film maker was tragically killed when he fell from a cliff whilst stepping back to frame a shot on Poros in 1950. Jennings developed a poetic montage technique.

As the viewer turns to look at the work, their mind also contains the thought ‘I will finish looking at the work, I will come to a conclusion of some kind’. The process of looking recognises the artwork as demanding a decision, a judgement. A further connection is made between thought and tongue. This judgement is either to be publicly announced, or simply vocalised internally. The process of judgement reinvigorates consideration, a further looking, again with the preordained move towards the finish, the judgement.

It is a record of time spent in consideration made apparent through the enactment of the decisions of this consideration. The painting is a site of conversation that the viewer must enter into; their act of judgement is to follow these movements, to accept or reject these decisions.

Perhaps the stasis of the painting’s surface is a mirage, a figment of a conceptual desire to perceive a space aside from time, an illusion. If the painting were considered in its movement through the dimension of both space and time, its surface might become a ruffled plane at the centre of a vortex, a swirl of movement and sound, of words and appropriations. This ‘informal crowd’, a shifting structure given tensile integrity by the focus of the object is the painting in its extended form, the form that allows it to apprehend thought.

In order for the painting to become still, for it to be apprehended, held in understanding by the mind, it becomes necessary for the object itself to be absent. Its presence becomes the focus for these destabilising loops, which will not allow a resting point. However the version of this work, which has been stored within the memory, to be reclaimed through contemplation or the prompting of a sketch or photograph, is perhaps equally as restless. The internalised approach within the space of thought seems to replicate the movements of the external.

### *Eclipse*

The image is central to these movements. The viewer shifts through momentary darkness in their attempts to construct wholeness, an attempt to move towards something undefined, something made present only as an assumption, (the assumption that what is seen is an armature for the unseen). Every journey is given shape, and accretes meaning, in the course of this movement through indeterminacy. To ‘find’ a place is a process of negotiation. Reconciliation of the diversity of branching possibility into a focused linear narrative is only possible through the deployment of deliberate occlusions, blurring and shifts of the was and the will be. The manufacture of apparatus that contain such pathways in any media, images, writing or sound demands the establishment of a tension between direction and drift, known

and unknown. This is not a tautness tending to stasis but more akin to the movement of an orbital body in the thrall of the unceasing tug of gravity.

The world is normally lit by either the strong gold light of the Sun or the pale silver light of the Moon. Here their convergence has blotted out all of their light. This is the landscape of the eclipse.

The moment of the eclipse is also a moment at which knowledge is revealed. The light of the Moon was not produced by its own luminescence but was in fact a reflection of Sunlight. The occurrence of the eclipse allows the mechanisms of cosmic movement to be discerned, and the relationship of different elements to be plotted. In the seemingly set orbits of the Sun and Moon moments of unexpected complexity occur. These are revealed through interaction, a process that might be described as conversation.

### *Conversation*

In the Eighteenth century the works of one popular genre of painting were referred to as 'Conversations' or 'Conversation Pieces'. This name was derived from the Italian '*conversazione*' or an *informal group*.<sup>262</sup>

The application of the name 'Conversation' suggests a different set of expectations for the object of the painting. It indicates a zone of activity. Anyone who is involved in a conversation expects not only to ask questions but also to answer them, not only to make judgements, but also to receive the judgements of others. The space of the conversation is open ended, and subject to interruption and surprise. A conversation is multifaceted, an arrangement in space that may contain both rational elements and the intrusions of chaos. How can the static space of a painting contain the fluid possibility of conversation?

Each painting of course may be split into two. Its' existence as an example of painting as a general category, and its' individual character, growing from the specifics it contains. There seems to be something antithetical in the technical structure of the artefact itself. The process of painting always involves taking a mobile and flexible medium and fixing it. Wet becomes

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<sup>262</sup> In essence they were small group portraits set in recognisable spaces or landscapes. The term was ideologically loaded, an expression of the development of the culture of 'politeness', the promotion of a system of public and personal relations that could avoid the disasters of civil war and religious faction which had blighted the previous century. For an account of the development of this form in England see Pg158-161 Uglow, Jenny. *Hogarth*, Faber & Faber, London, 1997 and Paulsen, Ronald. *Emblem and Expression*. Thames and Hudson, London 1975. The most complete expression of these ideas was found in 'The Spectator' the periodical founded and run by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele

dry. The movable set to immovability. The specifics of the composition would seem to follow a similar trajectory, the fixing of images as concepts in a set relationship.

The technical aspect of painting cannot simply be characterised as the triumph of the painter's will in shaping and fixing matter. It must also be an awareness of the constant encroachment of decay and of entropy. The painting then becomes an ordering of things in a manner designed to most effectively resist these processes whilst its function is being performed. The painted skin of the work is fragile. It is often thin cloth or board. It can be ruined by water, cut or pierced. Heat, improper preparation or over hasty applications of layers may cause the thin skin of paint to crack and fall away from the surface. The paint itself may be subject to change. Oils and varnishes discolour, chemical reactions bloom slowly. Colour can become fugitive, decaying in a long subtle bleaching by light or gradual sinking of heavy particles. Manuals of painting techniques are descriptions of hundreds of states of impermanence, accumulations of observations of decay, and measures of protection. A manual published in 1940 talks of the risk of aerial bombardment, and recommends the isolation of works from *'any structure that might be regarded as a military objective in wartime'*.<sup>263</sup>

Each age produces further information, more techniques of attempting to uncover and preserve the primal form of the work, yet x-rays produce alternatives, hesitations, and inexact dates.

In this way a conversation occurs, spread throughout time. The viewer (both as one who cares for the painting, and one who attempts to place it in some context) must attempt to ventriloquise the absent painter, and can only do so through a mesh of knowledge, conversations between art, science and history. The artist moves away from any finished work and can only recuperate it through a similar act of reconstruction.

### *The Surface as Desire*

The final image is then multiple, many figures before many picture planes, movements, discussions, debates and iconoclasm.

The continued existence of any work beyond the artist's studio is a function of a collective social desire, the decision to accord worth to the artefact. The work becomes a fugitive experience, an accumulation of practices of making, looking and preserving. At any point

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<sup>263</sup> Pg 93 International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, *Manual On The Conservation Of Paintings*, Archetype, London, 1997. (reprint of 1940 edition).

this decision can be reversed, and the gossamer skin of the surface be allowed to fade back into the mass of matter.

### *Leaving the Space*

A landscape empty but for three stubby crabbed tree stumps each sprouting a handful of bare branches. In the distance, on the horizon, is a range of mountains lying behind some loosely rendered brushes and blobs of green and brown. The top half of the panel is taken up with the sky, the left side dominated by a rainbow emerging from dark clouds, the right by a gold solar face radiating red beams. At a point in the sky almost at the centre of the panel between rainbow and sun floats the motto,

*"Iam Satis",*  
Now enough.

The landscape seems dark and wet, battered by the passage of a storm, the last jagged clouds of which can be seen around the rainbow. The viewer might first attribute the motto to the voice of the sun, announcing the ending of the storm. The sun's singular golden light emerges from the gloom only after the multiple colours of the rainbow. The viewer might reflect on how they themselves have undertaken this process working through a multiplicity of ideas towards a resolution.

Yet what power do the words have to halt the unfolding of the natural world? They are a Canute like command, a demonstration of limitation.<sup>264</sup>

The ribbon of the motto bisects the panel horizontally as if separating the sky and the land. The viewer might consider the motto at this point as acting as a barrier between these elements. The sky volatile and changeable, moving from storm to sun in contrast to the steadiness of the ground. The imprecation 'Enough' is perhaps directed towards these constant changes. If the landscape is taken to be a macrocosm of an individual the image represents the relationship between the vagaries of mind and the solidity of body. These processes demand a certain mental agility, reversals, un-doings and multiple juxtapositions, a radical doubting. An internal iconoclasm a systematic attack on the architecture of the mind. Each seeming solidity is undermined, shown to be a mere representation without inherent structure. The work of the individual within the chamber is not one of self-annihilation and erasure. It is a practice of balance functioning, like the

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<sup>264</sup> The dark age King Canute (Knut) who famously demonstrated the limitations of his power to his advisors by commanding the sea not to rise with the tide.

selective vandalism of the iconoclast as a tool of memory, a practical illustration of the limits of an objects power.<sup>265</sup> The passage of the storm through the natural world is a finite affair. It will come to an end, as must the passage of the storm of doubt, or the swelling of knowledge within the mind. Here the viewer might find a temporary resting place and be commanded to leave the dark chamber and emerge into the light of the sun again.

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<sup>265</sup> At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century many Europeans would have witnessed the cycle of iconoclasm enacted. The very public acts of violence against objects were countered with violence against bodies in the acting out of the ideological battles of the Reformation.

## APPENDIXES

## **Appendix I**

### *Some Notes on the Hawstead Chamber.*

The investigation of Lady Anne Drury's Painted Chamber produced a large amount of material. This included a detailed examination of each panel, and a historical overview of the cultural, spiritual and scientific atmosphere of the Hawstead milieu.

This material is too lengthy to include in full, however the following charts give a brief introduction to some of the themes of the panels and the complexity of their interrelation.



**Parva, sed apta mihi: Nec Tamen Hic Requies**

Small but fitting for me: But there is no rest here

**1**  
**Etiam asino dormienti**

**Empty landscape**

*Even for a sleeping Ass*

May be coupled with 'CPQR' theme of eventual triumph of truth in even the most unpromising circumstances. The arrangement of these panels seems to have been disrupted.

**3**  
**Et occulte, et aperte**

**Empty landscape**

*Both Hidden and Openly*

Linked to 4 'Obscure Secure' theme of private and public life and display

**5**  
**Speravi et perii**

**Empty landscape**

*I have hoped and perished*

Linked to 6 'Pascor, at haud tuto' theme of the fragility of life and its finitude.

**2**  
**Et hic vivitur**

*There is life here as well.*

Two figures mirror each other on opposite sides of the world. This panel is stylistically different from others, without a horizon line. This suggests it might originally have been displayed in a different position.

**4**  
**Obscure, secure**

*Hidden Safe.*

A bear sustains itself in hibernation through licking its paws.

**6**  
**Pascor, at haud tuto**

*I live but Insecurely.*

To survive the bird feeds from the mouth of a crocodile. Life and death are inextricably interlinked.

Amplior in coelo domus est		Qua cupio, Haud capio	
Ample space in heaven for home		What I desire I don't hold	
7 <b>Nec Curo Videri</b>	8 <b>Intus Idem.</b>	9 <b>Non Vacat Exiguus.</b>	10 <b>Iam Satis</b>
<i>I do not care to be seen</i>	<i>The same inside</i>	<i>Not happy with trifles.</i>	<i>Now enough</i>
The moment of eclipse linked with 10 'Iam Satis'	A consideration of appearance linked to 18 'Iam sumus ergo pares'	Linked to 11 themes of appetite and satiation.	The storm has passed.
11 <b>Trahit Sua Quemque</b>	12 <b>O puzzi, O ponga</b>	13 <b>Dum Transis, Time</b>	14 <b>Arsit, crepuit, evanuit</b>
<i>All are pulled along.</i>	<i>Scent or stink</i>	<i>Journey with care.</i>	<i>It has burned, crackled, gone out.</i>
A bat chasing a moth-all will find their own temptation.	Theme of judgement and mortality linked to 14 'Arsit crepuit, evanuit'.	The figure of the pilgrim can be linked with the philosopher charted the stars in 16 'Desipui Sapiendo'. Theme of travel.	A taper burns down lit from a flaming book.
15 <b>Mihi plaudo ipse domi</b>	16 <b>Desipui Sapiendo.</b>	17 <b>Pie sed Temere</b>	18 <b>Iam sumus ergo pares</b>
<i>I am happy with my home.</i>	<i>Great learning has made me foolish.</i>	<i>Pious but rash.</i>	<i>In this we are the same</i>
Theme of home and responsibility linked to 17 'Pie sed Temere'.	A philosopher attempts to read the positions of the stars.	The hawk rushes to the flames to protect the nest, and thereby exposes it.	Complex patterns of appearance undermine easy assumptions.

## **Frustra nisi dominus**

In vain without the Lord.

**19**

**Cum melle aculeus**

*With sweetness a sting.*

Linked with 20, themes of perception and distance, and travelling to 'higher realms'.

**21**

**Spem Fronte**

*A fair forehead.*

Linked to Dic Mihi a theme of appearance and self knowledge. Also perhaps a portrayal of sister and brother  
Anne Drury and Nicholas Bacon.

**23**

**Quid ergo Fefellit?**

*What then has betrayed us?*

The wreath of the victor burns. Authority and pride is examined. This questioning links the panel to 'Qua Tendis'.

**20**

**Alti, sed extra locum**

*High but out of place.*

A fire burns in the chimney, a traveller crosses the far fields.

**22**

**Descendendo adimpleor**

*By Descending I become fuller*

The well also appears in 'Haud facile Emergit' linked in actions of rising and falling as mental states in the practice of meditating within the chamber.

**24**

**Haud facile emergit**

*It rises with difficulty*

Here the full bucket is hard to move, which state is preferable, emptiness or fullness?

**Quod sis esse veils; nihilique malis.  
Suman nec metuas diem, nec opes**

Wish to be what you are and wish for nothing else  
Neither fear nor long for death

25

**Fruor nec quiesco**

*Good but not enough*

The theme of constant  
movement links this panel to 26  
'Et tamen Aversor'

26

**Et tamen aversor**

*And I turn away*

A man rows a boat with one oar,  
constantly circling.

29

**C.P.Q.R**

A mole in spectacles surrounded  
by gold reads the bible. A  
reference to Rome?

32

**Empty Landscape.**

The confused arrangement of  
this column suggest it has been  
jumbled in movement.

27

**Ut parta Labuntur**

*Gathered and Scattered*

Money is seen as a transitory  
thing perhaps linking the  
Monkeys actions to that of the  
camel in 28, 'Pura juvent alios'.

30

**Dum servi necessaria**

*Necessary Servants*

Water and fire run uncontrolled  
and cause ruin, whereas  
controlled they are a blessing.  
The theme of control is also  
present in 34.

33

**Qua tendis?**

*Where are you leading?*

The tongue like a serpent can  
wound through its venom.

28

**Pura juvent alios**

*Pure things help others*

A camel muddies its own  
drinking water.

31

**Dic Mihi, qualis eris?**

*Tell me how you will be?*

The painter and painting  
question each other and the  
viewer.

34

**Nocet empta dolore voluptas**

*Unbridled lust brings harm*

Enjoyment turns to misery  
through excess.

## Numquam minus sola : Quam cum sola

Never a less lonely woman : than when a woman alone

35 <b>Nil tamen impertit</b>  <i>However it imparts nothing</i>  A man tries to light a splint from a glowworm. Can we learn from the mundane world? This panel links with 38 and 39 in a trio exploring experiment and knowledge.	36 <b>Sic Orbis Iter</b>  <i>This is how the world moves</i>  The movement of the natural world is sideways and difficult to follow. With panels 40 and 42 this panel forms a triplet meditating on uncertainty	37 <b>Non fugitiva fides</b>  <i>Not fleeting faith</i>  The faithful greyhound was the crest of the Drury's. This may be linked to the boar in 41; this animal was the crest of the Bacon family.
38 <b>Fronti nulla fides</b>  <i>No faith in the appearance</i>  A philosopher measures his own head.	39 <b>Sat injussa calet</b>  <i>He boils up things unbidden</i>  An alchemist/fool heats a crucible. Is this reliance on bellows missing the need for an equal spiritual work to be undertaken?	40 <b>Ut moreris vives</b>  <i>In life, death</i>  Life and death are completely intertwined to live is to face death.
41 <b>Odi profanum vulgus</b>  <i>I hate the mindless mob</i>  The boar tramples on roses caring not for outward appearance.	42 <b>Nusquam tuta fides?</b>  <i>What then can we trust?</i>  Some sailors discover what they thought was solid ground is actually a Whale's back.	43 <b>Nec habet Victoria laudem</b>  <i>No glory in victory</i>  Rams clash heads. This panel seems to be part of a triplet with 37 and 41 relating specifically to the Drury family. Anne's husband Robert was a hot-tempered soldier. The quote is adapted from a passage in Virgil with states there can be no glory in victory if a woman is harmed.

## **Appendix II**

### *Three Days Contained*

The following is a description of a collaborative project undertaken in 2005 with Alex Baker. Although this collaboration does not form part of the main body of the research it is important to mention this as an important element of my practice, through which ideas are tested and developed.

Since producing this work the Black Cube has also been used for a staging of the opera 'The Victory Over the Sun' (2007).

### **Three days contained**

*A reflection on a collaborative work undertaken with Alex Baker.*

*Three days contained, the container a black cube. Three days action contained, three days thought contained, the air of three days contained, the light of three days contained, the time of three days contained.*

The initial premise of this work was that for three days two artists (Alex Baker and myself) would inhabit a black cube, living and working in it, and investigating the space around it. The cube was located in an unused, but still consecrated church, St Mary on the Quay. The church is a medieval building, standing near the docks in Ipswich. The entire area is now undergoing 'regeneration'.

This project emerged as an extension of previous collaborative works. These could be characterised as sound works which also involved strong visual and performance elements.<sup>266</sup> In these works certain themes might be tentatively identified, although it should be stressed that there has been no programmatic attempt to develop any theme consistently. The works could perhaps be described as a series of approaches to situations.

The sound element within our collaboration has focussed on examining the physicality of sound, as a wave of movement in air. To pursue this we have devised works that use simple technologies, microphones, speakers and amplifiers readily identifiable to most in the audience. We have been concerned to resist the process of technological mystification that is a strong presence in much contemporary sound work/performance.

We do not work as musicians, rehearsing and delivering a scored piece, or even an improvisation. We do not desire virtuosic control; we reveal that the situation of the event also exerts a strong control over us. Maybe at this point we can begin to explore how such a situation reveals our patterns of thought.

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<sup>266</sup> We have worked together for seven years, the following list details major works;  
2005 Framemakers, Daghdha Dance group, Limerick (residency).  
2003 Projector!, Camden Peoples Theatre, London./ Dee and Kelly, TWL, Camden Peoples Theatre, London. / Re.sound, Stroud Valleys Artspace, Stroud / Phrenica, 291 Gallery, London.  
2002 Sound is movement, Chisenhale Dance Studio, London (residency).  
2001 Golgonooza Chats Palace Arts Centre, London..  
2000 Dinner for Ears, NO gallery, London.  
1999 Sound Map, Chisenhale Dance Studio, London..  
1998 Louie Louie (conversation), Exhibitionists Festival, ICA, London..

In our live work we have consistently attempted to reveal how each of our actions directly affects the complex systems we build and how this produces further complex reactions. We have noticed that the introduction of any element of high technology (a laptop computer), or even an object of unidentifiable use, (say a black box with wires going into it) will immediately be assumed to be the 'instrument' that is somehow playing back pre recorded 'synthesized' sounds, everything else will become a stage for this playback to occur on, and all sounds heard will be assumed to have been pre-produced and pre-ordained using this 'instrument'. We have become interested in how this would seem to indicate a deep respect for the perceived potential of technology, and perhaps respect for those who control it, without any great engagement in the actual method of production. Perhaps this could be better characterised as a respect for a limited aspect of technology and also a desire for this limitation. The respect is for the device's ability to produce and control. This respect is manifest both in the producer and the consumer. This situation has been celebrated as a part of 'DJ' sampling culture in which individuals are able to use such technology to stitch together their culture from all that history offers, the post-modern utopia. Yet the situation is also paradoxical, the potential is limited; the technology has a designated function. The black box of the hi-fi presents an exterior skin, which cannot be pierced if it is to continue to operate as 'expected'.<sup>267</sup> Small running repairs might be undertaken, a fuse changed, a connection cleaned, but to achieve more potential, a more highly specified model must be acquired. In such a situation there emerges strict hierarchy of possibility, which mimics the hierarchy of technology, which itself is a hierarchy of access, access to knowledge and access to money.

When we construct a sound piece we attempt to connect the equipment we have together in ways that makes maximum use of all its available 'ins and outs' (that is the input and output sockets built into it; in the case of an amplifier this may typically be speaker outputs, microphone inputs, phono inputs for a turntable, CD player and tape deck). In this we are working with the device as it has been constructed, not designing modifications of the hardware to produce different capabilities. However we are working outside of the expectations of those who specified the device in that we may well access and use all of these possible connections simultaneously, or perhaps reverse the expected direction of the 'flow' of the device, or looping it back on itself. Each of the devices we use will also interconnect with others, collecting sound through microphones and distributing it through speakers. The

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<sup>267</sup> In fact most units will have a label which warns of 'a danger of death' to unqualified persons who venture within. This exists for very understandable health and safety reasons but does it also hint at a 'Bluebeards castle' urge amongst stereo manufactures? Computers at present can be physically much more porous, but the direction of their development seems to be pushing towards disposable sealed units, and the programmes which are needed to operate them act as the borderline for much interaction.



area of the event becomes charged; the sound vibrations in the air intersect and affect each other.

Within the space we have designated for the event we will begin to move elements closer together, or further apart, to place bowls to reflect sound or collect it. Our movements in the space also influence the sound. Rather than make something it might often seem more like we are trying to stabilize something. I often feel that the duration of the event is defined by attempts to bring it to a close, rather than any sense of dramatic climax or musical crescendo.

An exploration of recording, echoing, 'feeding back' the shape of vibration that forms sound is at the heart of our collaboration. As these works are produced by movement within a site they do not lend themselves to conventional stereo recording, which would demand all the sounds be 'mixed down' into two channels, and thereby become separated from the very specific location of their production. All our collaborative works have been resolutely 'live', responding directly to our physical presence. Yet this sense of 'live' is open to question. Our context may be very different from playing a CD on a home hi-fi but basically the same principles are in operation. The exploration of the impact of recording is as valid in sound as in vision, and as problematic.

Increasingly we have begun to see our work as an examination of our own perceptual structures, and a reflection on how difficult and deceptive such an examination might prove. Perhaps in some way the work is a modelling of how information might be moved into and around a body. A structure of microphones and speakers can be related to descriptions of neurons and the nervous system. The quest for the 'live' in the work, rather than the echoes, feedback loops and static buzz can also be viewed as a question of where to place the borderline of the apparatus and that of the operator, if such a border can be said to exist in the work at all.

Given these concerns creating a larger scale and longer term 'site' of exploration was a necessary next step for our collaboration. However it might be argued that on examining the results of this project our extended perceptual network was as prone to fantasy and emotion as each individual one was.

#### *A description of the cube;*

The cube was eight foot square, floating slightly above the ground. The walls of the cube were painted with blackboard paint whilst the inside structure remained unpainted bare

timber, giving the impression of layer or skin of black material.<sup>268</sup> Each wall and roof of the cube was hinged so they could be opened out, or closed at will. There were no locks or catches on any of the doors. When the sides and top of the cube were closed up it was impossible to see in or out. A seven-stepped ladder was built into the structure of the cube to enable access to and from the roof. The roof itself was strong enough to walk on.

The two elements of the cubes construction, its internal woodwork and its black casing were worked to different degrees.

The woodwork was carefully jointed. It was not filled, sealed, varnished or oiled. No element of its construction was concealed. The screws, bolts and dowels that held the carcass together could be seen, if you chose to look.

In contrast the black casing was highly finished. An appearance of smoothness and seamlessness was created, the surface carefully filled, and corners mitred to present an impression of a solid mass of material. The boards were painted on both sides and along their edges; this distanced them from a resemblance to a worked building material, or piece of furniture. The nature of the blackboard paint heightened this effect. As the paint dries the brush marks sink into the paint surface, creating a very flat even surface. The peculiarly matt finish of this particular paint seems to neither reflect, nor absorb much light. It seems instead to present a kind of neutral point, or pause in the light waves travel. Although the cube as an object was of considerable bulk the finish of the black surface generated a different impression. It seemed at times to abstract the perception of the cube from 'physical object' into something more like mental formulation of what the object would be. An object, which, although obviously present, did not project the sense of mass and weight that, might be expected from something so large.

In creating this piece there was a sense that rather than building a cube from the inside structure outwards we were somehow hollowing out, or getting inside this pre existing form and fashioning a habitation within it. This sense of habitation was important, and was prominent in how the work came to be described.<sup>269</sup>

### *Objects within the cube*

Within the cube a variety of objects were placed. Perhaps most noticeable amongst these was the quantity of audio equipment, amplifiers, speakers of all kinds and sizes, microphones and

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<sup>268</sup> Like an apple, as one onlooker remarked.

<sup>269</sup> We talked of 'living in' the cube or of 'occupying' it. The press release described us as 'moving in' to the cube.

large amounts of cabling. Initially this equipment was neatly stored in boxes. Then there were items of furniture, a table, two chairs, the structure of a bunk bed. Stacked all around were numerous other items; some hand tools, some paintings and prints, various pieces of timber and board, some bowls, some buckets and some chalk, and three books. The titles of the three books were; *Teach yourself joinery*<sup>270</sup>; *Teach yourself logic*<sup>271</sup>; and *the City of the Sun*<sup>272</sup>.

There were also several solid black cubes of smaller sizes. Once the cube had been constructed in the space, the night before we were due to occupy it, we packed all these items inside and closed up the doors.

#### *Some general remarks about the cube*

In our conversations with each other and with others some salient features of the nature of the black cube seemed to emerge. We referred to ourselves as occupying the cube, not as occupying the church; we lived inside the cube, the cube was inside the church. The cube is both theoretically and practically a movable site in itself, not specific to one location. Even when all the entrances of the cube were opened wide and its space became totally porous, people other than Alex and myself would not enter it. On a couple of occasions people asked permission to come in, but even with this permission freely granted they were loath to do so; gingerly venturing a step within and then quickly retreating along the same route. As occupants however we felt totally relaxed in climbing all over, writing on, adapting, rebuilding and striking the structure. We crossed the border from inside to outside easily, and engaged in conversations with those outside, however it was also possible to turn inwards and stifle any external communication, simply by seeming to once again re-enter the interior space of the work.

#### *The event*

The duration of the occupation of the cube was three days, (27<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> August) with the cube left in its final state afterwards for three weeks as a kind of functional relic.<sup>273</sup> At the request of the organisers an evening performance (31<sup>st</sup> August) was added to this schedule as a posthumous opening to the event.

On each of these days the space was open to the public from twelve am to six pm. We were in the space constantly except for an hour's lunch break at which point a sign was displayed (*The artists are out at lunch they will return at three*). It was also signed that at four on each

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<sup>270</sup> Howard, T.O, *Teach yourself joinery*, The English Universities Press, London,1967.

<sup>271</sup> Luce. A.A, *Teach yourself Logic*, The English Universities Press, London,1966.

<sup>272</sup> Compostanella. T, *The City of the Sun*

<sup>273</sup> I had no strong emotional response to the request that the cube be allowed to remain unoccupied. It was necessary for it to be occupied at sometime, but it was not simply a 'prop' for this occupation.

day we would give a lecture of our findings. It was never made clear whether or not we were in continual occupation of the cube, still inside the church after it was closed to the public.

When we opened the doors of the cube on the first day we had no specific plan of action, other than to remain within the space.<sup>274</sup> However we were immediately able to proceed with some basic tasks, opening some of the doors and unpacking and the objects we had put into the cube.

Over the three days the most visible activity we undertook was an extension of timber structures from the cube. Initially these grew upwards towards the ceiling, but also quickly out sideways and across the floor. A pattern emerged whereby a microphone or speaker would be mounted on the structure, then a speaker or microphone would be placed in relation to it. This constructional activity went on throughout the period we occupied the cube. The structures were not pre-planned, but produced ad-hoc. We did not consult each other before building. However it was also the case that any part of the structure was mutable, and could be altered, dismantled or incorporated into another structure. This process changed pace throughout the event, sometimes both of us would be working feverishly, at other times one would work and the other observe.

The concept of conversation has been present in our collaborative work from its earliest days.<sup>275</sup> This has never been a conversation of speech, but more often a conversation of two activities taking place next to each other. Maybe at certain points the entire site becomes a situation of conversation. In this case conversation might be seen as a point of knowledge about the situation being exchanged within, or absorbed into the enterprise as a whole. The moments of observation were the most obvious points of communication, in which the situation as a whole would be reviewed. In this sense we were communicating with the project as a whole, communicating with the black cube.

It would appear that to achieve this kind of communication there would need to be shared assumptions about the overall direction of the project. These assumptions did not exist in any formal sense, or in any form of pre-planning or 'scoring'. However maybe they can be seen as being hardwired into the constraints of the project, the manufacture of the black cube, the production of the proposal that laid out the periods of occupation.

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<sup>274</sup> We had arrived at the site in a state of exhaustion having only completed the construction late the previous night.

<sup>275</sup> *Alex Baker & Kit Poulson Louie-Louie (conversation)*, London, ICA, 1998.

In our occupation of the cube we consistently applied ourselves to extending and complicating the system of internal wiring that relayed sound around the construction and into and out of the space around it. Even when at relatively simple level early on the first day this became very sensitive to any movement or noise in or around the structure. Left undisturbed the space would generate a slowly growing and receding wave of feedback and then return to silence for around ten minutes. This pattern would be interrupted by movement in the cube, or by movement in the air around, for example the outside doors being opened or closed. As the system was complicated and elements moved around the range, volume and variety of sounds increased, at points sounds would be generated that would seem to be threatening the equipment. Here an intervention would be made to try and balance and stabilize the arrangement. These efforts would be informed by past experience, but would also require a re-ordering of the knowledge about the system acquired previously. In the intense periods of 'performance' this relearning is constantly baffled by the changes and movement of all the elements. This had lead to some observers describing the nature of the interaction between Alex and myself as being one of constant doing and undoing. Each action maybe seen as an undoing of something the other has previously constructed. There is certainly an element of this within our work; in a set of works based around a table this has arrived at the point where one of will actually saw a leg of the object, whilst the other screws a fresh one in a different place. It would be a mistake to characterise this as a dialectical stalemate. These are not random acts of destruction, but acts attempting to move towards something else, collaborative acts. Again they are grounded within the logic of the piece's entire duration, as a whole a transformation is attempted through an accumulation of attempts. At different points these attempts may appear uncontrolled, comical, pointless, even mindless.

These collaborative works, and the collaboration itself might usefully be thought of as a joint establishment of a site to operate within. This mutual process then allows diverse even oppositional activities to occur within the site. In order to preserve the site as a unique space for its duration we go through a process of re-inventing our responses and actions within it. From our first works to the present this has consistently confronted us with a problem, the problem of learning.

As we operate within the system we learn how to produce certain outcomes. Within the work this point of repeatability would also seem to indicate a level of finishing, of disengagement. It is a point of alienation within the collaboration, as it is a point of establishment of a system that does not require a mutual act of presence. This completion may also be the origin of the collaborative urge. Again it seems that the process is one that moves towards an ending of itself, its aim to fix itself, to halt flux.

The daily presentation of ourselves into the space of the cube was perhaps also maybe turning inside out, stretching on the cube pushing through onto the skeletal frame, and then reversing the process. And then we encounter a further complication, a further problem that emerges from the structure itself and brings doubt.

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